A Compendium of Catechetical Instruction

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A Compendium of Catechetical Instruction

EDITED BY

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Volume II

THE SACRAMENTS

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A NOTE.

Though the texts of both Catechisms had to be left as in the originals (see Preface, Volume I., page ix.), it will be remembered that as regards the Spiritual Relationship arising out of Baptism and Confirmation the new Code of Canon Law now limits that relationship to the baptized person on the one hand and to the minister and sponsors on the other in the case of Baptism, and to the confirmed person and the sponsor in the case of Confirmation; while the Spiritual Relationship arising out of Confirmation is no longer a diriment impediment of marriage. In the same way consanguinity in the collateral line, as a diriment impediment, does not extend beyond the third degree (see pages 46, 55, 100, 107, 514).

It may also be remarked here that, in the matter of the Paschal Precept, the expression "each in his own parish" is now a matter of counsel. (See page 170.)

Similarly, the Form of Marriage is now governed by the new Code of Canon Law (Lib. III., Tit. VII., Cap. VI.) (see page 511).

The "Prohibitive Impediments" indicated on page 535 are prohibitions rather than canonical impediments; while the prohibition of marriage in Lent and Advent is now limited to the solemn benediction of marriage during these seasons.

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THE SACRAMENTS

CHAPTER I

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—A knowledge of the sacraments necessary to the pastor.

EVERY part of the Christian Doctrine assuredly claims the pastor's knowledge and attention. But the discipline of the sacraments, which are so strictly commanded by God, and so fertile in the graces of salvation, demands his special skill and care in order that on the one hand the faithful may, through his diligent and careful instructions, be fitted for the worthy and saving reception of those high and holy gifts, and on the other hand that he himself may be faithful to the rule laid down in the divine prohibition : *Give not that which is holy to dogs ; neither cast ye your pearls before swine.*[1]

I.—EXPLANATION OF THE WORD SACRAMENT

2.—The word sacrament means (1) an oath.

As we are to treat of the sacraments in general, we must first of all begin with the force and meaning of the word itself, and point out its various significations, so that the precise meaning attached to it in this place may be clearly understood. The faithful then should be informed that the word sacrament, in so far as it concerns our present purpose, has been used in one sense by sacred and in another by profane writers. By the word sacrament some authors would express the obligation that arises when we are bound by oath to the performance of some service. Hence it is that the oath under which soldiers bind themselves faithfully to serve the state was called a "military sacrament"—a meaning that seems to have been very general among profane writers.

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[1] Matt. vii. 6.

or (2) A sacred thing hidden or concealed.

But amongst the Latin Fathers who have written on divine things, the word sacrament denotes some sacred thing lying concealed; while to express the same meaning the Greeks used the word mystery. It is in this sense we understand the word to be used in the Epistle to the Ephesians: *That He might make known unto us the mystery of His will;*[1] and to Timothy: *Great is the mystery of piety;*[2] and also in the Book of Wisdom: *They knew not the secrets of God.*[3] In these and in many other places it will be observed that the word sacrament signifies simply a sacred thing hidden and secret.

3.—and (3) Properly is a sensible sign producing grace.

Now, the Latin Doctors considered that certain visible signs, which at once produce grace, represent it and place it before the eyes, might properly be called sacraments. Though at the same time they may, as St. Gregory considered, be called sacraments for this reason, that under the veil of sensible things they contain a divine power which secretly accomplishes salvation.

It must not, however, be imagined that the word is of recent introduction into the Church. Readers of St. Jerome and St. Augustine will easily see that, to designate the manner under discussion, the ancient writers on our religion over and over again make use of the word sacrament, and, at times, the term symbol, or mystical sign, or sacred sign.

So much regarding the word sacrament, which indeed applies also to the sacraments of the Old Law. On these, however, there will be no need for the pastor to dwell, since they have been superseded by the law and grace of the Gospel.

II.—DEFINITION OF A SACRAMENT

4.—A sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing.

But as well as the meaning of the word which, up to this, we have been explaining, the nature and efficacy of the *thing* signified must be also carefully examined, and the faithful shown what a sacrament is. That the sacraments are to be included amongst that class of things through which salvation and justice are obtained is beyond doubt. But though there are many definitions well fitted and calculated to explain this point, yet there is none which puts it so fully and clearly as the definition given by St. Augustine, and adopted by all scholastic Doctors since his day: "A sacrament," he states, "is a sign of a sacred thing," or, as it has been expressed in other words which, however, come to the same thing: "A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace instituted for our justification."

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[1] Eph i. 9. [2] I Tim. iii. 16. [3] Wisdom ii. 22.

5.—A sign is something instituted to denote some other thing.

In order that this definition may be understood as clearly as possible, its several parts should be explained by the pastor. And first of all he should observe that all sensible objects are of two kinds. Some have been invented precisely to serve as signs; others have been established not for the sake of denoting something else, but for their own sakes alone.

Amongst the latter class may be reckoned almost all objects in nature. But to the former class are to be ascribed words, writing, standards, images, trumpets, and many other similiar things. If you deprive words of their power of expressing a meaning, the reason for their institution seems to disappear also. These, then, are properly called signs, since, as St. Augustine declares: "That is a sign which, besides what it presents to the senses, enables us to come to the knowledge of something else; for example, from a footstep which we see imprinted on the ground we at once know that some one whose footprint appears has passed that way."

6.—A sacrament is to be classed amongst signs.

This being understood, it will be clear that a sacrament is classified amongst those things that have been instituted for the purpose of conveying a meaning. By means of a certain appearance and resemblance it makes known to us that effect which God, by His power, accomplishes in our souls, though that power cannot be perceived by the senses. To illustrate this by an example: in Baptism, the outward washing with water, accompanied by certain solemn words, signifies this, that, by the power of the Holy Ghost, all the filth and defilement of sin is washed away and our souls become enriched and adorned with the glorious gift of heavenly justice; while, at the same time, that washing of the body, as will be explained in the proper place, accomplishes in the soul exactly that which it signifies.

7.—Proved from Sacred Scripture.

That a sacrament is to be classified amongst signs is clear from Sacred Scripture. Concerning circumcision, which was a sacrament of the Old Law, and which was given to Abraham, the father of all believers, the Apostle writes thus in his Epistle to the Romans: *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the justice of the faith.*[1] And when he affirms elsewhere that *all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death,*[2] it is lawful to conclude that Baptism signifies this—signifies, as the same Apostle says, that *we are buried together with Him by baptism into death.*[3]

It will be of no small advantage to the faithful to know that the sacraments are signs. They will be thus more easily convinced that what they signify, contain, and effect, is sacred and august; and, conscious of their holiness, they will be the more readily induced to worship and venerate the goodness of God towards us.

8.—A sacrament not a natural sign.

It is now necessary to explain the words "of a sacred thing," which is the other part of the definition. To do this properly, the acute and subtle remarks of St. Augustine on the various classes of signs must be touched on at some length.

Some signs are called *natural*, because, along with making themselves known to us, they also convey to our minds the knowledge of something else (which, as has been already shown, is common to all signs); for example, smoke, at the sight of which we at once infer the presence of fire. Now, this is called a *natural* sign for this reason, that smoke implies the existence of fire, not by arbitrary institution, but because experience teaches that at the mere sight of smoke we conclude that there is present there also the nature and power of fire even though we do not see it.

Nor a sign invented by man.

Certain other signs there are which are not natural, but invented and agreed on by men for the purpose of enabling them to converse with one another, to convey their thoughts to others, and in turn to understand the thoughts and opinions of others. How many and varied are these signs may be gathered from the fact that some of them are established in connection with the eyes, many with the hearing, and the rest with the other senses. Thus, when we desire to point out anything to another and, for example, do so by hoisting a flag, it is sufficiently evident that the meaning is conveyed through the sight; in like manner the sound of trumpets, lutes and lyres which is produced not only to afford pleasure, but frequently too is made use of to convey a meaning, is addressed to the ears. It is through this sense that words which have the greatest power of expressing the inward thoughts of the mind are principally conveyed.

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[1] Rom. iv. 11. [2] Rom. vi. 3. [3] Rom. vi, 4.

9.—But established by God.

But besides these signs which, as we have said, have been established by the will and agreement of man, there are certain other signs, and these admittedly of more than one class, which have been appointed by God. Of these some have been given by God to men for the one special purpose of signifying or admonishing. Such were the purifications of the Law, the unleavened bread, and many other details of Mosaic worship.[1] But God has appointed others which have the power not only to signify, but also to accomplish. In this class must manifestly be reckoned the sacraments of the New Law. For they are signs which were given by God, not invented by man, and which we firmly believe contain in themselves the power of producing the sacred effects which they signify.

10.—Meaning of the word "sacred thing."

There is, as we have shown, a great variety of signs; in like manner, the "sacred thing" referred to is also of more than one kind. With reference to the definition of a sacrament already given, writers on sacred subjects understand "sacred thing" to mean the grace of God which makes us holy and adorns us with the habit of all the divine virtues. They justly considered that the special appellation, "holy thing," should be given to grace, by means of which the soul is consecrated and united to God.

11.—Fuller definition of sacrament.

For the sake of greater accuracy and clearness it should be pointed out that a sacrament is a thing subject to the senses which, through the decree of God, possesses the power both to signify and accomplish sanctity and righteousness. From this it follows, as may be easily seen, that images of the saints, crosses and the like, though signs of sacred things, are not, on that account, to be regarded as sacraments. It will be easy to prove the truth of this definition by showing that in all the sacraments, as may be easily verified, there is a sensible thing, which at one and the same time signifies and produces grace, as we have already observed regarding Baptism, wherein we saw that the solemn ablution of the body signifies and, at the same time, produces a sacred effect which is accomplished inwardly by the power of the Holy Ghost.

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[1] Lev. xii.; Ex. xii. 15.

III.—WHAT THE SACRAMENTS SIGNIFY

12.—The sacraments signify more than one thing.

Furthermore, it is highly in keeping with the nature of these mystical signs that by God's decree they signify not one thing alone, but several things at once. This may be seen in all the sacraments, which show forth not only our sanctification and justification, but two other things also intimately connected with that sanctification—the passion of Christ our Redeemer which is the cause of sanctity, and life everlasting and the bliss of heaven to which our sanctification should be referred as to its end. Now, as this is found verified in all the sacraments, rightly have the holy Doctors taught that every sacrament has in it a threefold power of signifying—it brings to remembrance something already past ; it indicates and denotes something present ; and it foretells something yet to come. Nor are we to suppose that this was taught by them without any foundation in Holy Writ ; for when the Apostle writes : *All who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in His death,*[1] he makes it clear that Baptism is to be counted a sign because it puts us in mind of the passion and death of our Lord. Furthermore, when he says : *We are buried together with Him by baptism into death ; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life,*[2] it is clear from his words that Baptism is a sign by which it is shown that heavenly grace is poured into our souls enabling us to lead a new life, and perform the offices of true piety easily and cheerfully. Finally, when he adds : *If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, in like manner we shall be of His resurrection,*[3] he teaches that Baptism also furnishes no obscure indication of eternal life which we are to attain thereby.

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[1] Rom. vi. 3. [2] Rom. vi. 4. [3] Rom. vi. 5.

13.—At times it denotes other things also.

Besides these various classes and modes of signifying which we have enumerated, it often happens that a sacrament denotes and marks the presence not of one thing alone but of more things than one. This is easily understood by those who reflect that the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, at once signifies the presence of the true body and blood of Christ as well as the grace which it imparts to those who receive it with purity of heart.

From all this, then, pastors will not find it difficult to show the wondrous power of God, and the many hidden miracles contained in the sacraments of the New Law, thus enabling the faithful to estimate the devotion with which they are to be venerated and received.

IV.—WHY THE SACRAMENTS WERE INSTITUTED

14.—Causes of the institution of the sacraments: (*a*) To increase our faith.

Nothing appears better calculated to teach the true use of the sacraments than a careful exposition of the reasons why they were instituted. Several are enumerated.

Of these the first is the weakness of the human mind, which we know to be so constituted by nature, that no one can aspire to mental and intellectual knowledge except through the medium of those things which are perceived through one or other of the senses. To enable us, then, more easily to understand the effects wrought by the hidden power of God, that same Supreme Maker of all things has, in His good-will towards us, most wisely ordained to manifest that very power through the medium of certain sensible signs. As has been admirably said by St. John Chrysostom: "If man were but free from the burthen of a body, those good gifts would have been presented naked and covered by no veil; but because the soul is joined to the body, it was altogether necessary to use the help of sensible things in order to have them understood."

(*b*) **To confirm our hope.**

The second reason is that our mind is not easily induced to believe in mere promises. And therefore God, from the very beginning of the world, has been wont to indicate His will by words and that frequently; but occasionally—when He designed some work the magnitude of which might weaken faith in His promise—He added to His words other signs which often had a miraculous appearance. Thus, when God sent Moses to liberate the people of Israel, and when Moses, distrusting the aid even of God who had sent him, feared that a heavier burthen than he could bear was being laid on him, or that the people would not lend a ready ear to the divine oracles and words, the Lord confirmed His promise by many signs.[1] Just, then, as in the Old Testament, God willed to confirm His important promises by certain signs, so also in the New Law Christ our Saviour in promising us forgiveness of sins, heavenly grace, the communication of the Holy Ghost, instituted certain sensible and visible signs to serve as pledges of the obligations contracted by Him, and leave us no room for doubt that He would be faithful to His promises.

(*c*) **To afford a remedy to the soul.**

A third reason, according to the words of St. Ambrose, was in order that the sacraments should be available, as the remedies and medicine of the Samaritan in the Gospel, to restore or preserve the health of the soul. The power that springs from the passion of Christ—that is, grace which He merited for us on the altar of the cross—must, to reach our souls, pass through the sacraments as through a channel. There can be no hope of salvation for anyone in any other way. And therefore our most merciful Lord deigned to leave in His Church sacraments guaranteed by His word and promise, through which we may rest fully assured beyond all shadow of doubt that the fruit of His passion is truly communicated to us, provided only that each one of us piously and religiously applies that remedy to himself.

(*d*) **To be a bond of union among the faithful.**

There is also a fourth reason why the institution of the sacraments seems necessary, and it is that they might serve as notes and symbols to distinguish the faithful from all others; particularly since, as St. Augustine observes, "there can be no society of men belonging to any religion, true or false, who can be, so to say, consolidated into one body unless they are bound together by some bond of visible signs." Both these do the sacraments of the New Law accomplish—they distinguish Christians from infidels and bind the faithful together by a sort of holy bond.

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[1] Ex. iii.

(*e*) To enable us to profess our faith.

In addition to these reasons, it may be pointed out that another very just motive for the institution of the sacraments may be found in the words of St. Paul: *With the heart we believe unto justice; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation*,[1] for by the sacraments we show we openly profess our faith and make it known before men. Thus in receiving Baptism we openly testify our belief that, by virtue of the water with which we are washed in that sacrament, a spiritual cleansing is accomplished in our souls.

(*f*) Excite charity.

In the next place the sacraments possess great power not only to kindle and excite faith in our souls, but also to inflame them with that charity with which we should love one another, remembering that by partaking of those holy mysteries in common we are bound together in the closest bond and are made members of one body.

(*g*) To increase our humility.

Lastly, and what is of the highest importance in the study of Christian piety, the sacraments tame and repress the pride of the human mind, and render us humble by forcing us to subject ourselves to sensible elements in obedience to God, from whom we had impiously fallen away and turned to serve the elements of this world.

Summary.

These, then, are chief points that seem necessary to be laid before the people regarding the name, nature, and institution of a sacrament. And when they have been carefully explained by the pastor, it will be his next duty to show the constituents or parts of each sacrament, as also what rites and ceremonies should accompany their administration.

V.—MATTER AND FORM OF THE SACRAMENTS

15.—A Sacrament consists of matter and form.

In the first place, then, it should be explained that the *visible thing* which is found in the definition of a sacrament given above, is not one only, even though it must be held to constitute but one sign. There are two things from which each sacrament is made up—one having the nature of *matter*, and is called the *element*; the other having the functions of *form*, is commonly called the *word*. Such is the teaching of the Fathers; and on this subject the words of St. Augustine are well known and familiar to all: "The *word* is joined to the *element*, and a sacrament is the result." By the words *sensible thing*, then, the Fathers understand not only the *matter* or the element—such, for example, as water in Baptism, chrism in Confirmation, oil in Extreme Unction, all of which fall under the sense of sight—but also the words which constitute the *form* and fall under the sense of hearing. Both these the Apostle clearly pointed out when he says: *Christ loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life.*[1] In this passage both the matter and form of the sacrament are clearly indicated.

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[1] Rom. x. 10.

16.—Why words are used.

Words have to be added to the matter to render the meaning of the element employed fuller and clearer. Of all signs, words evidently are the most significant, and if there were no words in the case in question it would necessarily be difficult to know what the matter of the sacrament signifies and declares. Thus, as may be seen in Baptism, water has the power of refreshing no less than of washing, and may well be a sign of both. Now, unless the words are also added, anyone might easily make it a matter for conjecture as to which of these two significations should be selected in Baptism—there could be no attempt at certainty. But when the words are added, we at once see that it has the force and meaning of cleansing.

17.—Excellence of the sacraments of the New Law.

Our sacraments far excel the sacraments of the Old Law in this, that in the administration of the latter there was, as far as we know, no definite form used—whence it arose that they were very uncertain and obscure. But our sacraments have so definite a form of words that if by chance it is departed from the nature of the sacrament can no longer subsist. Hence it is that the form is as clear as possible and leaves not the smallest room for doubt.

These, then, are the parts which appertain to the nature and substance of the sacraments, and of which each sacrament necessarily consists.

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[1] Eph. v. 25, 26.

VI.—CEREMONIES USED IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

18.—Certain ceremonies are used in the administration of the sacraments.

Along with the matter and form certain ceremonies are used which, though (unless in case of necessity) they cannot be omitted without sin, yet even if they are actually omitted they are not to be considered as lessening the validity of the sacrament for the simple reason that they do not affect its essence. And with good reason has it been always observed, even from the very infancy of the Church, that the sacraments were administered with certain solemn ceremonies.

In the first place it was highly becoming to surround the sacred mysteries of religion with such a form of reverence as to show that we handle holy things holily.

Moreover, the ceremonies more clearly display and, so to say, place before our eyes the effects of the sacraments, and impress more deeply on the minds of the faithful the sanctity of those sacred things.

Finally, they raise up the minds of the beholders and attentive observers to the contemplation of things sublime, and excite faith and charity within them. This being the case, all the greater care and pains should be taken to bring home thoroughly to the minds of the people the meaning of the ceremonies that accompany the administration of each sacrament.

VII.—THE NUMBER OF THE SACRAMENTS

19.—The number of the sacraments.

It is now our duty to explain the number of the sacraments, a knowledge of which point has this advantage that the greater the number of aids to salvation and life eternal which the people know to have been provided by God the greater will be the piety with which they will devote the powers of their souls to blessing and praising His singular goodness towards us.

20.—That number is seven: Why?

The sacraments of the Catholic Church, as is proved from Scripture, handed down to us by the tradition of the Fathers, and witnessed by the authority of the Councils, are seven in number. Why they are neither more nor less may, with sufficient probability, be shown from the analogy that exists between the natural and the spiritual life. Seven things are necessary to man to enable him to exist, preserve his life and be of use to himself and to the public—to be born, to grow, to be nourished, to be healed when ill, strengthened when weak, and (concerning society at large) to have rulers to guide him by their power and authority, and finally to perpetuate both himself and his race by the lawful propagation of offspring. Now, as all these seem to correspond sufficiently to that life by which the soul lives to God, the number of the sacraments may reasonably be deduced from them.

21.—Proved from Sacred Scripture.

First, there is Baptism, which is the gate, so to say, of all the sacraments, and by which we are born again in Christ; next there is Confirmation, by virtue of which we grow and are increased in the grace of God—"To the Apostles who had already been baptized, our Lord," as St. Augustine notes, "said: *Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high;*"[1] then comes the Eucharist, by which as by a food truly heavenly our soul is nourished and sustained, and concerning which our Saviour has said: *My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed;*[2] in the fourth place comes Penance, by the help of which lost health is restored after the wounds inflicted by sin; next there is Extreme Unction, by which the remains of sin are taken away and the powers of the soul renewed, according to the testimony of St. James concerning this sacrament: *If he be in sins they shall be forgiven him;*[3] then follows Orders, by which the power publicly to administer the sacraments and perform all other sacred functions in the Church is perpetuated; finally comes Matrimony, with this purpose, that, by the lawful and holy union of man and woman, children may be born and religiously brought up to the service of God and for the preservation of the human race.

22.—There was not a like necessity for all the sacraments.

It should, however, be particularly observed that, though all the sacraments contain a divine and wonderful power, yet all have not a like and equal necessity or dignity nor one and the same significance. Three of them are necessary beyond the rest, though that necessity is not the same, Thus Baptism is necessary to everyone without exception, according to our Lord's declaration: *Unless a man be born again of water and*

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[1] Luke xxiv. 49. [2] John vi. 56. [3] James v. 15.

the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;[1] while Penance is necessary to those alone who, after Baptism, have defiled themselves with mortal sin—they cannot escape eternal ruin unless they truly do penance for the sin committed. Orders also, though not necessary to each of the faithful, is, however, absolutely necessary to the Church as a whole.

The Eucharist excels the other sacraments in dignity.

If we consider the dignity of the sacraments the Eucharist far exceeds all the others in sanctity and in the number and greatness of its mysteries. These general remarks will be better understood when we come to explain, in the proper place, the characteristics of each sacrament.

VIII.—THE AUTHOR AND MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENTS

23.—The Author of the sacraments is Christ.

It now remains to see who it is from whom we have received these sacred and divine mysteries. Unquestionably the dignity of any great gift is very much enhanced by the dignity and worth of him from whom that gift comes. The question, however, presents little difficulty. For as it is God that justifies man, and as the sacraments are the wonderful instruments for acquiring justification, it is evident that one and the same God in Christ must be acknowledged to be the Author both of justification and of the sacraments. Furthermore, the sacraments have such power and efficacy as to penetrate into the inmost soul, and as it is the property of God's power alone to penetrate the heart and mind of man, it is clear from this that the sacraments were instituted by God Himself through Christ. Along with this we must hold with firm and certain faith that they are inwardly dispensed by Him—St. John affirms that he had received this testimony from Jesus Christ Himself: *He who sent me to baptize with water* [the Precursor assures us] *said to me: He upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending, and remaining upon Him, He it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*[2]

24.—The sacraments are administered by men, not by angels.

Though God is the Author and Dispenser of the sacraments, He yet willed that they were to be administered in the Church not by angels, but by men; and that the ministry of man is just as necessary to constitute the sacraments as are matter and form is confirmed by the perpetual tradition of the Fathers.

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[1] John iii. 5.

[2] John i. 33.

25.—The unworthiness of the minister does not impede the efficacy of the sacraments.

Now, as the ministers of the sacraments represent in that holy function, not their own person but the Person of Christ, for this very reason it is that be they good or be they bad, they validly perform and confer the sacraments, provided they use the matter and form which, by Christ's institution, the Church has always observed, and provided also they intend to do what the Church does in that administration. Hence, unless those who receive them wish to deprive themselves wilfully of so great a boon and resist the Holy Spirit, nothing else can stand in the way of the grace that is the fruit of the sacraments. That this was always a fixed and certain doctrine in the Church is clearly proved by St. Augustine in his controversy with the Donatists. And if we require the testimony of Holy Writ, let us listen to the Apostle's words: *I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*[1] From this passage it is quite clear that just as the wickedness of those by whose hands trees have been planted does not injure the trees, so those who have been planted in Christ by the ministry of bad men can suffer no spiritual loss on account of sins in which they have had no part. Hence, as the Holy Fathers have taught us from St. John's Gospel, even Judas Iscariot baptized many, not one of whom do we read was baptized again; thus, as St. Augustine wisely wrote: "Judas conferred baptism, and after Judas none were re-baptized whom he had baptized; John baptized, and yet after John's baptism they were baptized again. For the baptism given by Judas was Christ's baptism; but that given by John was John's own. Not that we prefer Judas to John, but we prefer the baptism of Christ, even though given by the hands of Judas, to John's baptism, even though given by the hands of John."

26.—It is a great crime to administer the sacraments with an unclean conscience.

Let not pastors, however, or other ministers of the sacraments on hearing this consider it sufficient to observe exactly the rules laid down for the correct administration of the sacraments, without paying any regard to integrity of life and purity of conscience. For although the administration of the sacraments must be carefully attended to, yet it is by no means all that is required in connexion with that function. Pastors should always recollect that, while the sacraments never lose the divine virtue they contain, they yet bring eternal death and ruin to those who administer them with unclean hands. Holy things, as should be repeated over and over again and cannot be repeated too often, should be handled holily and reverently. *To the sinner,* says the prophet, *God hath said: Why dost thou declare My justices and take My covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hast hated discipline?*[1] Now, if it be unlawful for a man stained with sin to speak on divine matters, how great is not the guilt of him who, conscious of many crimes, is yet not afraid to perform these sacred mysteries with polluted lips, or take into his foul hands, touch them, hold them forth and administer them to others?—particularly, as it is written by St. Denis, that it is not so much as permitted to the wicked to touch the symbols (as he calls the sacraments). Let the ministers of holy things, then, first of all, strive after holiness, and approach with a pure heart to the administration of the sacraments; and let them so exercise themselves in piety that through the frequent handling and use of them they may, through God's help, attain a more abundant supply of grace every day.

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[1] 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

IX.—EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENTS

27.—**The effects of the sacraments.**

All this being borne in mind, it should now be shown what are the effects of the sacraments—an instruction calculated to throw not a little light on the definition of a sacrament given above. These effects are chiefly two.

(a) First effect—justifying grace.

Rightly does that grace hold first place which, according to the usage of the holy Fathers, we call *sanctifying;* and which the Apostle has most clearly referred to when he says: *Christ loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life.*[2] But in what way so great and wonderful an effect is produced by the sacrament in the soul that, to use the words of St. Augustine, "water washes the body and touches the heart,"—this cannot be comprehended by human reason and intelligence. It may be taken for granted that of its own nature no sensible thing is endowed with such power as to be able to penetrate the soul. But by the light of faith we know that in the sacraments is the power of Almighty God, by help of which they effect that which natural elements cannot by their own power accomplish.

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[1] Ps. xlix. 16.

[2] Eph. v. 25, 26.

28.—The reception of sacramental grace was in the infancy of the Church accompanied by miracles.

Lest any doubt as to this effect should remain in the minds of the faithful the most merciful God willed, when the sacraments first began to be administered, to show by the evidence of miracles the effects they inwardly accomplished in order that we might firmly believe that these effects, though far beyond our senses, are always inwardly produced. Passing over the fact, then, that on our Saviour being baptized in the Jordan, *the heavens were opened* and the Holy Ghost appeared *in the form of a dove,*[1] to show us that when we are washed in the saving fount His grace is poured into our souls—omitting this, since it pertains to the signification of Baptism rather than to the administration of the sacrament, do we not read that when on the day of Pentecost the Apostles received the Holy Ghost, by which they became thenceforth ready and courageous to preach the truth of faith and undergo many trials for Christ's glory, *suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, ... and there appeared to them cloven tongues as it were of fire* ?[2] It is not clear from this that in the sacrament of Confirmation the same spirit is given to us and such strength bestowed on us to enable us resolutely to encounter and resist the world, the flesh, and the devil—our perpetual enemies ? As often as the Apostles administered these sacraments for some time in the beginning of the Church, these miracles were witnessed, until the faith having been confirmed and strengthened they began to cease.

29.—The sacraments of the Old Law did not confer grace.

From what we have now shown regarding the first effect of the sacraments—justifying grace—it will be abundantly clear that in the sacraments of the New Law there is a better and more excellent virtue than was possessed by the sacraments of the Old Law, which being *weak and poor elements,*[3] *sanctified such as were defiled to the cleansing of the flesh,*[4] not of the spirit. Hence they were instituted only as signs of what was to be accomplished in our mysteries. On the other hand the sacraments of the New Law, flowing from the side of Christ, *who by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God,*[1] and thus by virtue of the blood of Christ work in us that grace which they signify. Hence if we compare them with the ancient sacraments, they will be found to be not only more efficacious, but much more profitable, holy, and august.

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[1] Matt. iii. 16. [2] Acts. ii. 2, 3. [3] Gal. iv. 9. [4] Heb. ix. 13.

X.—THE CHARACTER IMPRINTED BY THREE SACRAMENTS

30.—The second effect— character — is found in only three sacraments.

The second effect of the sacraments, which, however, is not common to all but peculiar to three—Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders—is the *character* they imprint on the soul. When the Apostle says: *He that hath anointed us is God, who also hath sealed us, and given the pledge of the spirit in our hearts,*[2] not obscurely does he by the word *sealed* describe a character the property of which is to impress a seal and mark.

Character is a mark impressed on the soul.

Now this character is a certain mark which is impressed on the soul, and can never be blotted out or destroyed. St. Augustine thus writes of it: "Shall the Christian sacraments be able to do less than the bodily mark wherewith a soldier is marked? That mark is not stamped anew on the soldier on his return to the army; but the old mark is recognized and approved."

31.—Why a character is impressed.

Now the character has two effects; it qualifies us to receive or perform something sacred, and distinguishes one man from another by some mark, Both these we acquire in the character of Baptism—we are qualified to receive the other sacraments, and the faithful are distinguished from the Gentiles who follow not the faith. The same may be noted in the characters of Confirmation and Orders—by the former we are armed and prepared as soldiers of Christ to make public profession and defence of His Name, and fight against the enemy, and *against spiritual powers of wickedness in high places*;[3] and at the same time we are distinguished from those who are but newly baptized, and are, so to say, new-born infants; while the latter confers the power of consecrating and administering the sacraments, and at the same time distinguishes those who are invested with this power from the rest of the faithful. We must therefore hold this rule of the Catholic Church, which teaches that these three sacraments imprint a character and are never to be repeated.

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[1] Heb. ix. 14.
[2] 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.
[3] Eph. vi. 12.

32.—Means to excite the people to venerate and frequent the sacraments.

Such are the instructions to be given on the sacraments in general; and in their explanation pastors should zealously endeavour to accomplish two things principally—first, to let the people understand the great honour, respect, and veneration due to these divine and heavenly gifts; the other, that as the sacraments have been designed by the most merciful God for the common salvation of all, to lead them to use them piously and religiously, and be so inflamed with the desire of Christian perfection as to consider it a great loss if they be deprived of the most salutary use of Penance and the Eucharist for any length of time. Pastors may easily accomplish these two objects if they often inculcate what has been said on the divinity and fruit of the sacraments:—*first*, that they were instituted by the Lord our Saviour, from whom nothing but what is all-perfect can come; *second*, that when they are being administered the most efficacious influence of the Holy Ghost is present pervading the inmost recesses of the heart; *third* that they are endowed with a wonderful and sure power of healing souls, and that through them are communicated the immense riches of the passion of our Lord; and, *finally*, let them show that the whole Christian edifice does indeed rest on the most firm foundation of the cornerstone, but that if not supported on every side by the preaching of the word of God, and by the use of the sacraments, it is greatly to be feared that it may, to a great extent, totter and fall to the ground. By the sacraments we are ushered into life—it is by this food, so to say, we are nourished, preserved, and increased.

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

1. NATURE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Q. What is treated of in the fourth part of the Christian Doctrine?

A. In the fourth part of the Christian Doctrine the sacraments are treated of.

Q. What is meant by the word sacrament?

A. By the word sacrament is meant a sensible and efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ to sanctify our souls.

Q. Why do you call the sacraments sensible and efficacious signs of grace?

A. I call the sacraments sensible and efficacious signs of grace because all the sacraments signify, by means of sensible things, the divine grace which they produce in our souls.

Q. Show by an example how the sacraments are sensible and efficacious signs of grace.

A. In Baptism the pouring of water on the head of the person, and the words: *I baptize thee*, that is, I wash thee, *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, are a sensible sign of that which Baptism accomplishes in the soul; for just as water washes the body, so in like manner does the grace given in Baptism cleanse the soul from sin.

Q. How many sacraments are there, and how are they called?

A. The sacraments are seven—Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

Q. What is necessary to constitute a sacrament?

A. To constitute a sacrament it is necessary to have the matter, the form, and the minister, who must have the intention to do what the Church does.

Q. What is the matter of the sacraments?

A. The matter of the sacraments is the sensible thing made use of in effecting the sacrament; such, for example, as natural water in Baptism; oil and balsam in Confirmation.

Q. What is the form of the sacraments?

A. The form of the sacraments is the words which are pronounced in order to effect the sacrament.

Q. Who is the minister of the sacraments?

A. The minister of the sacraments is the person who administers or confers the sacrament.

2. THE PRINCIPAL EFFECT OF THE SACRAMENTS, I.E., GRACE

Q. What is grace?

A. Grace is an inward and supernatural gift given to us without any merit of our own, but through the merits of Jesus Christ in order to gain eternal life.

Q. How is grace distinguished?

A. Grace is divided into *sanctifying* grace, which is also called habitual grace, and *actual* grace.

Q. What is sanctifying grace?

A. Sanctifying grace is a supernatural gift inherent in our soul, and rendering us just, adopted children of God and heirs to Paradise.

Q. How many kinds of sanctifying grace are there ?

A. Sanctifying grace is of two kinds—*first* grace and *second* grace.

Q. What is *first* grace ?

A. First grace is that by means of which one passes from the state of mortal sin to the state of justice.

Q. And what is *second* grace ?

A. Second grace is an increase of first grace.

Q. What is *actual* grace ?

A. Actual grace is a supernatural gift which enlightens the mind, moves and strengthens the will in order to enable us to do good and avoid evil.

Q. Can we resist the grace of God ?

A. Yes, we can resist the grace of God because it does not destroy our free will.

Q. By the aid of our own powers alone can we do anything available to life eternal ?

A. Without the help of the grace of God, and by our own powers alone, we cannot do anything helpful to life everlasting.

Q. How is grace given us by God ?

A. Grace is given us by God chiefly through the sacraments.

Q. Do the sacraments confer any other grace besides sanctifying grace ?

A. Besides sanctifying grace the sacraments also confer sacramental grace.

Q. What is sacramental grace ?

A. Sacramental grace consists in the right acquired in the reception of a sacrament, to have at the proper time the actual graces necessary to fulfil the obligations arising from the sacrament received. Thus when we were baptized we received the right to have the grace to live a Christian life.

Q. Do the sacraments always confer grace on those who receive them ?

A. The sacraments always confer grace provided they are received with the necessary dispositions.

Q. Who gave to the sacraments the power of conferring grace ?

A. Jesus Christ by His passion and death gave to the sacraments the power of conferring grace.

Q. What sacraments confer *first* sanctifying grace ?

A. The sacraments which confer *first* sanctifying grace, and render us friends of God, are two—Baptism and Penance.

Q. How are these two sacraments called on that account ?

A. These two sacraments, Baptism and Penance, are on that account called *sacraments of the dead*, because they are instituted chiefly to restore to the life of grace the soul dead by sin.

Q. Which are the sacraments that increase grace in those who already possess it ?

A. The sacraments which increase grace in those who already possess it are the other five—Confirmation, Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony, all of which confer *second* grace.

Q. On this account how are they called ?

A. These five sacraments—Confirmation, Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony—are on that account called *sacraments of the living*, because those who receive them must be free from mortal sin, that is, already alive through sanctifying grace.

Q. What sin does he commit who, conscious that he is not in a state of grace, receives one of the sacraments of the living ?

A. He who, conscious that he is not in a state of grace, receives one of the sacraments of the living, commits a serious sacrilege.

Q. What sacraments are most necessary to salvation ?

A. The sacraments most necessary to salvation are two—Baptism and Penance. Baptism is necessary to all, and Penance is necessary to all who have sinned mortally after Baptism.

Q. What is the greatest of all the sacraments ?

A. The greatest of all the sacraments is the Eucharist, because it contains not only grace, but also Jesus Christ the Author of grace and of the sacraments.

3. THE CHARACTER IMPRESSED BY SOME OF THE SACRAMENTS

Q. What sacraments can be received only once ?

A. The sacraments that can be received only once are three—Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

Q. Why can the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders be received only once ?

A. The three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders can be received only once, because each of them imprints a *character.*

Q. What is the character that each of the three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders imprints on the soul ?

A. The character that each of the three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, imprints on the soul is a spiritual mark that is never effaced.

Q. What is the purpose of the character that these three sacraments impress on the soul ?

A. The character that these three sacraments imprint on the soul, serves to mark us as members of Jesus Christ at Baptism, as His soldiers at Confirmation, and as His ministers at Holy Orders.

First Instruction on the Sacraments

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

HAVING already spoken of Faith and of the principal truths we are bound to believe, we now come to the consideration of the gifts we must receive in order to accomplish our sanctification and salvation. It is a subject of the most far-reaching importance, for, as the Council of Trent points out, the sacraments are nothing more or less than the channels through which the merits of the passion and death of our Saviour are communicated to us, and the theological virtues infused into our souls. Through their means grace is acquired, preserved, and strengthened, and through them it is restored when lost, "Through them (the sacraments) all justice either has its beginning, or, if begun, is increased, or, if lost, is restored."

It is, then, of the utmost importance to be well instructed on the nature and properties of the sacraments in order to be able to receive them properly. The scant and insufficient, not to say false and erroneous knowledge regarding them that is not unfrequently met with, and especially ignorance of the dispositions requisite for their worthy reception, leads to their being often received with little or no fruit, and renders not only useless, but sometimes even hurtful, the very remedy prescribed by our Lord for our salvation.

Before speaking on the sacraments one by one I must first of all set forth a general idea of them, and draw attention briefly to various points common to all the sacraments.

The word *sacrament* is capable of various meanings; but the sense here attached to it is precisely this: a visible and outward sign instituted by Jesus Christ to signify and give grace.

To understand this, it is necessary to bear in mind that, in His wonderful providence, God has willed in all things to adapt religion to our nature and our needs. If, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, we were pure spirits and without bodies, He would have established a purely spiritual religion for us; but the fact of being composed of a body and soul, depending in everything on the senses, and ordained to live together and to be united in the profession and exercise of one and the self-same worship, rendered necessary the aid of outward signs by which to incline our souls more readily to spiritual and heavenly things, and to afford to others a visible proof of the worship we profess and thus become bound together in the bonds of one single religious worship.

Hence arise the splendour and magnificence of our churches and our altars ; hence the imposing hierarchical order of popes, bishops, and priests ; the majesty of our sacred functions ; the pomp and frequency of our solemnities and festivals ; the chants, the hymns, the numerous rites and venerable ceremonies of the Church—all exterior signs willed and prescribed by God Himself to stir up our faith, increase our piety, unite and bind the faithful together in one common bond.

And this is also the reason why God, instead of directly conferring His sanctifying grace, as He could easily have done, without the intervention of outward agencies, has willed to confer it, and under ordinary circumstances actually does confer it in no other way than by means and under the veil of material things, such as water in Baptism, chrism in Confirmation, oil in Extreme Unction, and so on with the other sacraments, along with the words which must accompany the administration of each sacrament. All these are things which are seen, touched, felt,—in a word, they are visible and outward signs.

And they were ordained by God for a double purpose—to signify the grace they contain and truly to confer it.

First of all, *to signify it.* It is the nature of a sign, as St. Augustine explains, to convey not only a knowledge of what it is in itself, but also a knowledge of some other thing distinct from it. Thus, money, which in itself represents a silver, gold, or bronze coin, conveys also the idea of a certain definite value which that coin possesses. In the same way, the signs used in the sacraments signify the interior grace annexed to them by a certain analogy, proportion and resemblance between the sign and the thing signified. Thus, the action of the priest as he pours water over the head of the infant, and at the same time pronounces certain words, represents the invisible operation by which God interiorly washes and purifies that infant's soul ; in the same way as water applied outwardly to the body washes away dirt and stains. The same remark will apply to the other sacraments.

In the second place the sacraments are not mere empty signs denoting grace, but they are also *efficacious signs producing grace ;* and hence it is that we say that, as well as signifying grace, *they produce and confer grace.* This is one of the principal prerogatives possessed by the sacraments of the New Law in comparison with the sacraments of the Old Law. The Old Law had its own sacraments, such, for instance, as circumcision, the paschal lamb, and many prescribed purifications. But they were, according to St. Paul, *weak and needy elements*;[1] they possessed no sanctifying power, but merely prefigured and represented the grace that was to be conferred by our sacraments. On the other hand our sacraments contain grace in themselves and truly confer it on those who place no obstacle in the way.

And how do they confer it? *Ex opere operato*, as theologians say; that is, by the force and efficacy intrinsic to and inherent in the sacrament itself; in other words, their power does not depend on the piety or merits of either the minister or the recipient.

Not of the person who administers the sacraments; hence a priest, no matter how unworthy he may be, if he baptizes, absolves from sins in the tribunal of Penance, or consecrates the Holy Eucharist on the altar, baptizes and absolves and consecrates validly, provided the rite of the Church is properly observed, and his wickedness does not lead him to corrupt or deprave it.

Nor does the power of the sacrament depend on *the merit of the receiver*. This, it should be carefully borne in mind, does not mean that the sacrament must always produce its effect, no matter in what manner it is received, well or ill; for it is certain that the proper dispositions are required on our part as conditions necessary for the sacrament to produce its effect; but it does mean that the effect must always be ascribed to the power of the sacrament, and not to our dispositions, even though the latter are required and demanded. The dispositions referred to do nothing more than remove the obstacles that may stand in the way of the efficacy of the sacrament; but the efficient productive cause of the grace is the sacrament itself. Thus, when you approach the sacrament of Penance with a sorrowful confession of your sins, God grants you pardon of them, but He grants it precisely on account of and in contemplation of the merits of His only Son, which are applied to the soul in the sacrament itself—in virtue of that Precious Blood which is poured over the soul in the moment when the priest pronounces the words of absolution.

Hence, if the sacrament is deprived of its efficacy, it is due to our fault alone and not to the sacrament. What cause is there in the world, be it ever so powerful, that is not impeded in its effect, if it encounters difficulties in the subject on which it works? Fire has the power to burn, but if the material is not combustible it will not burn. This, then, is what we are to understand when we say that the sacraments have the power to produce and confer grace.

But some one may ask: What relation, what connexion, can there possibly be between material signs and grace, which is something spiritual, supernatural, divine? Naturally no connection; wash and re-wash yourself over and over again and you will not succeed in blotting out a single sin. These signs, then, have not, and cannot have a relation or connexion with grace unless through divine institution. And thus it is—the Author of the sacraments is Jesus Christ. He alone, as God, could, to an outward rite—to an external ceremony—impart the power to remit sins, confer grace, and sanctify the soul.

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[1] Gal. iv. 9.

The sacraments instituted by our Lord are seven: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. For this number there is no need to seek any other reason than the will of Him who was pleased to institute neither more nor less. What is certain is that with this number of sacraments He has deigned to provide for all our spiritual needs, and precisely in the same order and progression in which He provides for our temporal needs.

Seven things are in fact necessary towards the natural life of man—to be born, to grow, to be fed, to recover health if it has been lost, to regain powers weakened by infirmity, to have an unbroken succession of officials to govern, and of children, to preserve the human race. Matters are no way different with regard to the spiritual life of the Christian—Baptism gives him birth, Confirmation makes him strong, the Eucharist feeds him, Penance heals him, Extreme Unction fortifies him against the dangers of death, Holy Orders gives ministers to the Church, while Matrimony perpetuates both pastors and people. Thus, in the seven sacraments, we have a remedy for our various spiritual needs.

They are all great; yet each one, as the Council of Trent teaches, has its own special excellence, according to which one is preferable to another. With regard to intrinsic dignity, the greatest of all is the Eucharist, because it contains the very Author of grace; with regard to the extrinsic dignity of the minister appointed to confer them, Confirmation and Orders are the greatest, because the bishop alone can dispense them; with regard to their signification, the most remarkable is the sacrament of Matrimony, representing, as it does, the hypostatic union of the Divinity and Humanity in Christ, and His moral union with His Church; with regard to ease of reception, Extreme Unction, which remits sins without the laborious process of confession; with regard to necessity, the most important are Baptism and Penance—the former being indispensably necessary to all, the latter to those who have lost their baptismal grace. This absolute necessity is not verified in the case of the other sacraments—leaving aside Orders and Matrimony, which are only necessary to society at large, and not to the individual; neither Confirmation, nor the Eucharist, nor Extreme Unction are absolutely necessary, since one may be saved without them. They are, however, sometimes necessary as a matter of precept, and in such a case it would, under certain circumstances, be a sin to omit them.

Another point to be noticed is that each sacrament has three essential constituent parts—MATTER, FORM, and INTENTION. First of all these things must be used, or these actions done which were prescribed by Christ, such, for example, as water in Baptism, bread and wine in the Eucharist, confession of sin in Penance. These things or actions are called the *matter* of the sacraments. At the same time in which these things are used or these actions done, certain words, determined by Christ, must be uttered, and those are called the *form*. Both matter and form can be vitiated so as to render the sacrament invalid and null, as will be seen later on. Finally, there is requisite the intention in the minister to administer the particular sacrament, or at least to do what the Church intends to do. Hence the sacrament would be null if conferred in joke, or in derision, or without the actual, or at least virtual, wish to confer it.

In the solemn administration of each sacrament the Church uses various ceremonies which, however, do not effect its essence, which is independent of them, nevertheless they are not to be omitted or neglected, because their purpose is to bring out as clearly as possible both the dispositions which the sacraments demand in us, and the effects they produce and the obligations we contract in the reception of them.

Finally, the general effect of the sacraments already referred to is to confer sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace, however, is conferred by them in different ways, that is, in its beginning or as an increase, according to the different natures of the sacraments. Some of them—Baptism and Penance—are ordained to transfer us from a state of sin and of enmity with God into a state of grace and of friendship with Him, and on this account are called the *sacraments of the dead*, from the fact that they cause new life in the soul already dead through sin. The other five are ordained to increase the grace that already exists in us, and are, therefore, called the *sacraments of the living*, which, moreover, require a pre-existing state of grace for their worthy reception.

Besides sanctifying grace, which is common to all the sacraments, there is another peculiar and special effect of some of the sacraments, namely, a *character*, seal, or spiritual mark, impressed on the soul and specially consecrating us to God—either as Christians, as happens in Baptism, or as soldiers of Christ, as is done in Confirmation, or as ministers of God, as is done in Holy Orders.

Between grace and character there is a double difference that ought to be borne in mind. The first is that grace can be, and is, lost through sin, while character can never be lost—it can never be effaced, neither by sin nor by apostasy, nor by infidelity; it is ever-abiding and inherent under all circumstances, not only in this life but in the life to come, and hence it is that the three sacraments referred to cannot be received more than once.

The second difference is that in the sacraments grace is received only by persons properly disposed, and is received in greater or less quantity according to the greater or less degree of disposition; while character is received by all, no matter how badly disposed, provided only the sacrament has been validly administered.

But it may occur to some one to ask: Must those who have had the misfortune to receive these sacraments unworthily remain for ever deprived of the grace of Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders, since they are unable to receive them again on account of the character impressed? Not so; the moment the obstacle placed by sin is removed through a good confession, the grace of the sacrament revives and blooms just as if it were received afresh at that moment.

These, then, are the general notions to be borne in mind regarding the nature of the sacraments. I have glanced at them only briefly here, since later on they will receive further light during the detailed explanation of each sacrament which I propose to make. Meanwhile, what conclusion are we to draw? What should be the fruit of this instruction? Is it not too clear and manifest not to be known already?

Let the first fruit be to return heartfelt thanks to Jesus Christ for having endowed us with so many and such powerful and easy means of receiving, preserving, and increasing His grace. These means cost us little indeed; but dear was the price He paid for them, since they cost Him nothing less than His bitter passion and death, which is the one and only meritorious cause of the sacraments. The sacraments are, according to the prophetic words of Isaias, the saving waters springing from the Saviour's adorable wounds to water and fertilize the barren and stony soil of our souls: *You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains.*[1]

In the second place, entertain the greatest possible esteem and respect for them—an esteem and respect which we should show in two ways: by using them frequently and by using them well. It is a great evil to abandon them and stand aloof from them; it is a greater evil to profane them by receiving them without the necessary dispositions; and it is downright blindness and folly to prefer to die and be lost rather than use the remedy mercifully prepared for us by Jesus Christ, or change it by our own fault into deadly poison.

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[1] Isaias xii. 3.

Second Instruction on the Sacraments

SANCTIFYING GRACE CONFERRED BY THE SACRAMENTS

In our last instruction we considered the sacraments in general. We saw why they were instituted and who instituted them ; we also considered their number, their nature, and their effects, which, as we saw, are two—grace and character. We contrasted these two effects so as to explain them up to a certain point, and bring into relief the difference that exists between them. As to character, we have nothing more to add. But the importance of the other effect is so great, and the subject is so difficult, that I have thought it well to devote a separate instruction to a brief and clear statement of the doctrine of grace in general and to that of sanctifying grace in particular.

In a general way every gift of God is a grace. Whatever we are and whatever we have is ours simply because God has, of His own free will, bestowed it on us. Our body, our soul, our life, our thoughts, our will, our senses, our faculties and possessions are ours because He has given them to us. We live, we move, we think, we will, we speak, we do, simply because He has given us the power of living, moving, thinking, willing, speaking, doing. Each of these powers is His gift, and consequently is a grace of God.

Yet, though freely given us by Him, it may, however, be said that we have a certain right to them in this, that God, having created man, could not but give the faculties and powers that belong to the nature of man. He need not have created us at all, but having created us it was but natural—but due to our nature—that He should also give the faculties corresponding to and implied in that nature. Hence it is that all the various gifts referred to are called natural graces, for, as we have seen, they are given because our nature demands them for its natural development.

But, as you know, these were not the only gifts conferred on man when for the first time he sprung fresh from the hands of God. God raised him above the nature and the destiny that belonged to him as man—gave him a far higher destiny, and far nobler endowments than any his nature could lay claim to or expect. In a word, man was elevated and destined to know, love, and serve God here on earth and to be happy with Him hereafter in heaven. In other words, God lifted man up above the limits of his nature, gave him a destiny that was not included in the claims of that nature, endowed him with gifts and graces far above the requirements of that nature. And hence it is that these gifts are called supernatural graces, because they are above the reach or capacity of ordinary human nature.

In virtue of these graces our first parents were created in a state of original justice—their souls were unspotted, beautiful, glorious, and dear to God—they were placed in the garden of Paradise, they were to enjoy a life of unclouded happiness here on earth in the knowledge, love, and service of God, in innocence and peace, and when the time should come for them to leave this world they were to enter at once into the Beatific Vision and into the possession of the unending glory of heaven.

But they were not faithful to the trust reposed in them by their bounteous Creator. They sinned, and by their sin they brought about their ruin, and with their own ruin the ruin of their posterity. They were deprived of their original justice and innocence, and of all the graces implied therein, and instead of remaining friends of God, holy and dear in His sight, they became objects of His wrath, slaves of the devil, and at the mercy of their own evil passions, which were let loose unrestrained. Their sin was not confined to themselves—it descended to all their posterity—it is called original sin, and with one exception it stains the soul of every child of Adam, so much so that every infant born into the world is defiled with original sin, and is at enmity with God, and so long as that sin remains uncancelled the soul is hateful to God, can never enter into His presence, nor enjoy the happiness of heaven.

But God in His goodness did not forget the creature of His hands—in the fullness of time He mercifully deigned to apply a remedy to the ills of suffering humanity, and He sent His own beloved Son, who purchased the redemption of the human race at the cost of His own bitter passion and death. In virtue of that redemption our souls are cleansed from original sin, are rendered bright and beautiful once more, and once more do we become friends of God and heirs of His kingdom. Now, the gift that enables us to pass from the state of sin to the love and friendship of God is sanctifying grace, which we familiarly describe as a supernatural gift bestowed on us by God for our salvation.

There are two great kinds of grace. First of all there is actual grace, which is the grace that at any given moment enables us to do good and avoid evil. Of this grace we shall have occasion to speak at another time; and we may now devote all our attention to sanctifying grace, which is the gift of God that makes the soul holy and pleasing to Him, transfers it from a state of sin to a state of grace and abides in the soul and unites us to God, or, as it has been more accurately defined, it is a supernatural gift, inhering in the soul, rendering us just, God's adopted children, and heirs to Paradise.

It is a supernatural gift because freely given by God and for a supernatural object—an object above the capacity of unaided human nature.

It inheres in the soul, because it abides in the soul—does not merely cling to it, nor remain merely attached to it as a picture to a wall—but becomes one, so to say, with the soul it embellishes and beautifies. Let us explain this by an example. Iron when cool is black, and ugly, and hard, and unbending. But heat it red hot and notice the change. It loses its former appearance and becomes bright and glowing, so much so that brightness and heat become for the time being part and parcel of the iron, and so long as it remains hot they abide in it and cannot be separated from it, while the iron itself becomes beautiful and easily moulded into various shapes. In the same way sanctifying grace penetrates the soul, abides and inheres in it, transfuses it, and transfers it from a foul and ugly thing into a thing of beauty and brightness ; just as iron when heated becomes like the fire itself, so does the soul when filled with the grace of God become beautiful and like to God, thus justifying the expression of St. Peter who calls it *a participation of the divine nature,*[1] and of St. Paul who speaks of it as *poured forth in our hearts.*[2]

Furthermore, we say *it renders us just,* whence it is also called justifying grace, because it washes away the stains of the soul ; makes us just and upright in the sight of God, by the application of the blood of Jesus Christ, which, as St. John asserts, *cleanseth us from all sin* ;[3] strengthens and beautifies the soul, rendering us *holy and unspotted in His sight ;*[4] and makes us temples of the Holy Ghost : *Know you not,* asks St. Paul, *that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God ?*[5] Take an example. We read that the body of Lazarus was four days in the grave, and that corruption had already set in, rendering that body foul and loathsome and hateful to the sight. But our Lord in His tender compassion gave back the soul to that body, and the body that a moment before was foul and loathsome and unbearable, became, in an instant, a thing of life and beauty once more. In the same way is the soul dead and foul through sin ; but the instant the grace of God is poured into that soul it is at once justified, and becomes bright and beautiful in itself and lovable in the sight of God.

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[1] 2 Pet. i. 4. [2] Rom. v. 5. [3] 1 John i. 7. [4] Eph. i. 4. [5] 1 Cor. vi. 19.

Furthermore, sanctifying grace makes us *God's adopted children. Whosoever*, says St. Paul, *are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry : Abba* (*Father*) ;[1] while St. John cries out in wonder at the immense love of God *bestowed upon us that we should be called and should be the sons of God.*[2]

And from this it also follows that grace makes us *heirs to the kingdom of heaven ;* for, as St. Paul explains, *if we are sons* (we are) *heirs also—heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ* to that glory which is to be ours in the realms of unending bliss, when the sufferings of this time shall have passed away and the glory that is to come is revealed to us. Grace, then, leads to everlasting happiness. *They*, says St. Paul, *who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ.*[3]

And worthy of mention also is it that grace gives dignity and value to all our good works. *I am the vine*, says our Lord, *and you are the branches, he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit* ; [4] and St. Paul : *Our present tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*[5]

In one word, grace is the instrument of our salvation—by grace we are delivered from the guilt of sin that is past ; by grace we are preserved from the danger of sin to come and are enabled to work out our last end, which is to know, love, and serve God here on earth and to be happy with Him for ever in heaven.

It is worth noting here that though all the sacraments confer sanctifying grace, they do not all confer it in the same way. The object of two of the sacraments, Baptism and Penance, is to cleanse the soul from sin by conferring grace, and they are on that account called *sacraments of the dead*, because previous to their operation the soul is dead by sin. Now, the grace produced in this case is *justifying* grace, or *first* grace, because it renders the soul just and is the first grace that enters the soul after sin. It will be seen easily how it is that these two sacraments are absolutely necessary ; for it is by them that first grace is, in the ordinary ways of Providence, infused into the soul, cleansing it from sin and justifying it.

The object of the five remaining sacraments is to increase the *first* sanctifying grace already existing in the soul, and the grace they produce is called second grace. They are called *sacraments of the living* because they presuppose the existence of *first* sanctifying grace in the soul, so much so that a person who should consciously receive them in a state of mortal sin would be guilty of a very grave sacrilege.

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[1] Rom. viii. 14, 15. [2] 1 John iii. 1. [3] Rom. v. 17. [4] John xv. 5. [5] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Furthermore the more second grace is increased the holier and purer and dearer to God does the soul become, just as the more iron is heated the more bright and beautiful does it grow. *The path of the just,* says the wise man, *as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day.*[1] But, on the other hand, it should not be forgotten that grace may be diminished, as is done by venial sin, or lost altogether, as happens in mortal sin. *Let him that thinketh himself to stand take heed lest he fall.*[2]

There is one other grace conferred by the sacraments, and that is sacramental grace, which consists in the right which the reception of any one sacrament gives to have, when needed, the actual graces necessary to discharge the obligations or duties imposed by that sacrament. Thus in Baptism we acquire the right to have the graces necessary to live a Christian life; in Confirmation, to profess our faith in spite of all dangers; in Penance, to prevent us from falling back into sin; in Extreme Unction, to enable us to overcome our enemies at the hour of death, and so on with the other sacraments.

From all that has been said so far it will be clear how absolutely necessary is grace, and especially first grace, and consequently how necessary are the sacraments that confer grace, especially Baptism and Penance. And it will be also clear how ready our Lord is at all times to pour that grace into the soul, provided only we correspond to His wishes: *Behold,* He says, *I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and shall open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.*[3]

And yet, though God holds out His hands filled with grace to impart to us, we can resist that grace or not consent to it, for grace still leaves us our own free will. If it is to operate in us, we must co-operate with it. Almighty God, says St. Augustine, is indeed ready to heal all that are infirm, yet He heals none but those who are willing to be healed. He that made you without yourself, he explains elsewhere, will not save you without yourself.

Now, as has been said more than once, it is through the sacraments that we receive justifying grace. If grace, then, is so necessary and so precious, necessary and precious also must be the sacraments through which that grace is communicated to us; and if this is true, true also must it be that there is in all the wide world no gift we should prize so much and use so carefully as the sacraments. Jealously do we guard the apple of our eye through which the light of God's beautiful creation is poured into the soul; more jealously far should we preserve the purity and integrity of those sacraments that lead the soul to the blessed sight of the vision of God Himself.

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[1] Prov. iv. 18.

[2] I Cor. x. 12,

[3] Apoc. iii. 20.

"Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? . . . I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[1]

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[1] Rom. viii. 35-39.

CHAPTER II

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Roman Catechism (Part II)

1.—The sacrament of Baptism should be frequently explained.

From what has been hitherto said on the sacraments in general, it will readily be seen how necessary it is, both for a knowledge of the Christian religion and for the practice of Christian piety, to know all that the Catholic Church proposes for our belief regarding each sacrament in particular. Now, he who reads the Apostle attentively will unhesitatingly conclude that a perfect knowledge of Baptism is strongly demanded of the faithful—not only over and over again, but in words of greatest weight and full of the spirit of God, does he renew the memory of that mystery, commends its divinity and places before our eyes the death, burial and resurrection of our Redeemer for our contemplation and imitation.

2.—Special days for such explanation.

Let pastors, then, never conclude they have devoted too much pains and study to the explanation of this sacrament; but, besides those days on which, in accordance with time-honoured usage, the divine mysteries of Baptism are especially explained—that is on Holy Saturday, and the Vigil of Pentecost, when it was the custom of the Church to celebrate this sacrament with the greatest devotion and with special ceremonial—they should take advantage of other occasions to treat of this subject.

For this purpose no time seems more opportune than when the pastor observes that a number of the faithful are present on the occasion of some particular baptism; for, though he will not be able to touch on all the points that refer to this sacrament, it will then be much easier to explain one or two points at a time when the faithful can piously and religiously contemplate the meaning of these things which they both hear with their ears and see with their eyes in the sacred ceremonies of Baptism. The result will be that each one present will be admonished by what he sees taking place in the person of another, and will call to mind the solemn promise by which he bound himself to God when he was initiated by Baptism; and he will also consider within himself whether in his life and conduct he has shown himself such as the very profession of Christianity implies.

I.—NAME AND NATURE OF BAPTISM

3.—The word Baptism signifies sacramental ablution.

Now, in order that the things that are to be taught may be lucidly set forth, the nature and substance of Baptism must be explained. First of all, however, it will be necessary to explain the meaning of the word itself.

Baptism, as everyone knows, is a Greek word, which, though used in Holy Writ to signify not only that ablution which is coupled with a sacrament, but also all other kinds of ablution, and is even sometimes extended to express suffering; yet among Church writers it is employed to denote, not every kind of ablution but only that which is connected with the sacrament, and which is always accompanied by a prescribed form of words—a sense in which the Apostles very often used it in accordance with the institution of Christ.

4.—Other names for Baptism.

The holy Fathers also made use of other names to express the same thing. Thus, St. Augustine states that it was called the *sacrament of faith*, because they who receive it profess their unlimited faith in the Christian religion. Others called this sacrament *illumination*, because the heart is illuminated by the faith which it professes in Baptism; *call to mind*, says the Apostle, *the former days, wherein, being illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions,*[1] meaning by *former days* the time when they were baptized. Chrysostom also, in his sermon to the baptized, calls it a *purgation*, because through Baptism we *purge out the old leaven*[2] in order to become *a new paste.* He also calls it a *burial*, and a *planting*, and the *cross of Christ*—the foundation for all which names may be gathered from the Epistle to the Romans; while the reason why St. Denis called it the *beginning of the holy Commandments* is evident, seeing that this sacrament is, as it were, the gate through which we enter into the fellowship of the Christian life, and begin to obey the divine commands. So much briefly regarding the word.

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[1] Heb. x. 32.

[2] 1 Cor. v. 7.

5.—Baptism defined.

Now as to the definition of the thing itself. Though many definitions may be collected from sacred writers, yet that seems fittest and best which is gathered from the words of our Lord in St. John, and of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;*[1] and the Apostle speaking of the Church says: *cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life.*[2] From this it follows that Baptism may be well and accurately defined to be: The sacrament of regeneration by water in the word. By nature we are born from Adam children of wrath, but by Baptism we are born again in Christ children of grace. For *He gave power to men to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name, who are born not of the blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*[3]

6.—An error to be guarded against.

But in whatever words the nature of Baptism may be defined, the people must be instructed that this sacrament consists of an ablution along with which, according to the institution of our Lord and Saviour, must be coupled certain solemn words as the holy Fathers have always taught. This is proved by the very clear testimony of St. Augustine: "The word is joined to the element and it becomes a sacrament." It will, however, be necessary to insist on this point all the more diligently, lest the faithful be led into the error of imagining, as commonly happens, that the very water which is preserved in the holy font for administering Baptism is the sacrament. It is to be called a sacrament then, and then only, when we actually use the water by way of ablution, and, along with the water, the words instituted by Christ our Lord.

Now as the single sacraments consist of matter and form, as we have said in the beginning when treating of the sacraments in general, it becomes necessary for the pastor to explain what precisely each of these is in Baptism.

7.—The matter of Baptism.

The matter, then, or element of this sacrament is any sort of natural water, be it sea-water, river-water, water from a bog or well or fountain—what in a word, without any qualification, is usually called water; for our Saviour has taught that *unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;*[1] while the Apostle says that the Church was cleansed *by the laver of water;*[2] and we read in the Epistle of St. John: *There are three that give testimony on earth: the spirit, the water, and the blood.*[3] This can also be shown from several other passages of Holy Writ.

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[1] John iii. 5. [2] Eph. v. 26. [3] John i. 12, 13.

8.—Baptism of fire.

The statement, however, of St. John the Baptist that the Lord will come and will baptîze *in the Holy Ghost and in fire,*[4] must not for a moment be understood of the matter of Baptism, but must be applied, either to the inward operation of the Holy Ghost, or at least to the miracle that occurred on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down from heaven in the form of fire, a miracle which Christ our Lord had foretold in another place: *John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.*[5]

9.—This matter was prefigured in the Old Testament.

In the Sacred Scripture also, we may note that this matter was signified both by figures and prophetic oracles. The Prince of the Apostles in his first Epistle shows that the flood by which the world was cleansed, because *the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and all the thoughts of their hearts were bent upon evil,*[6] was a figure and image of this water.[7] Writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul pointed out that the passage of the Red Sea typified the same water;[8] not to speak of the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian,[9] the wonderful virtue of the Pool of Bethsaida,[10] and many similar figures plainly symbolic of this mystery.

As to prophecies, none can doubt that those waters, to which the prophet Isaias [11] so freely invites all who thirst, and those which Ezechiel [12] in spirit saw issuing forth out of the temple, as also the fountain which Zacharias foretold to be prepared for *the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman,*[13] were intended to indicate and express the saving water of Baptism.

10.—Why water was selected by God.

How much it was in keeping with the nature and efficacy of Baptism that water should have been made its special matter St. Jerome, in his letter to Oceanus, has abundantly pointed out. For the present purpose, however, pastors can, in the first place, show that, as this sacrament is absolutely necessary to all without exception for the attainment of everlasting life, water, which is always at hand and easily procurable by all, was the most suitable matter. In addition to this, water admirably denotes the effect of Baptism ; water washes away uncleanness, and hence aptly denotes the force and efficacy of Baptism, by which the stains of sin are wiped away. Moreover, as water refreshes the body, so Baptism abates the heat of the passions.

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[1] John iii. 5. [2] Eph. v. 26. [3] I John v. 8. [4] Matt. iii. 11. [5] Acts i. 5. [6] Gen. vi. 5. [7] I Peter iii. 20. [8] I Cor. x. 1. [9] 4 Kings v. 14. [10] John v. 2. [11] Isaias lv. 1. [12] Ezech. xlvii. 1. [13] Zach. xiii. 1.

11.—Chrism is also used with the water.

It should be observed, however, that though in case of necessity simple water without any other admixture is sufficient for the matter of this sacrament, yet when Baptism is administered with solemn ceremonies it has been always the practice of the Catholic Church, in accordance with Apostolic tradition, to add holy chrism by which, as is clear, the effect of Baptism is more fully denoted. The people should also be taught that though it may sometimes be doubtful whether this or that water is genuine, and such as the perfection of the sacrament demands, yet this much must be held as certain, that on no account whatever can the sacrament of Baptism be ever constituted from any other matter than natural water.

12.—The form of Baptism should be frequently explained.

Now that the matter which is one of the two parts of which Baptism consists has been carefully explained, the pastor will take the same care to explain the form also, which is its other and not less essential part. And in the explanation of this sacrament he will bear in mind that he should attend to it with all the greater care and diligence, for this reason, that the knowledge of a mystery of such holiness not only can of itself delight the faithful exceedingly,—a pleasure commonly found to arise from the knowledge of divine things—but also should be eagerly sought after on account of its almost daily use. For—as will be more fully explained later on—occasions frequently arise when Baptism must be administered by members of the laity, women especially, and hence it is that everything pertaining to the essence of this sacrament should be well known and thoroughly understood by the faithful at large.

13.—The words of the form.

The pastor, then, will teach in clear and plain words, intelligible to all, that the perfect and absolute form of Baptism is as follows: *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* So was it appointed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, when, according to St. Matthew, He commanded the Apostles: *Go ye and teach all nations. baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*[1] By the word *baptizing*, the Catholic Church, divinely instructed, rightly understood that the form of this sacrament should express the action of the minister, and this is expressed by the words *I baptize thee.* And as, besides the minister, it should signify both the person baptized and the principal efficient cause of Baptism, the pronoun *thee* and the distinct names of the Divine Persons are therefore added; so that the complete form of the sacrament is embraced in the words mentioned just now: *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* It is not the Person of the Son alone, of whom St. John writes: *He it is that baptizeth,*[2] who accomplishes the sacrament, but it is the work of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity together. By saying, however, in the *name* and not in the *names*, we clearly indicate that in the Trinity there is but one nature and Godhead—for in this place the word *name* is referred not to the Persons, but to the divine substance, virtue, and power which are one and the same in all Three Persons.

14.—Not all the words of the form are essential.

It is, however, to be observed that in this form which, as we have shown, is full and perfect, some of the words are absolutely necessary, so much so, that if they be omitted there can be no sacrament; while there are others not so necessary as by their omission to invalidate the sacrament; such, for instance, is the word *Ego*,[3] the force of which is contained in the word *baptizo*—in the Greek Church it was even omitted, because of a variation in the sense intended to be conveyed; for they considered that no mention need be made of the minister. Hence it came to pass that in Baptism in the Greek Church this form was universally used: "Be the servant of Christ baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And yet from the decision and definition of the

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[1] Matt. xxviii. 19.
[2] John i. 33.
[3] This applies to the Latin form, not to the English.

Council of Florence, it appears that the sacrament was validly administered by them, inasmuch as by those words all that pertains to the essence of Baptism—that is ablution, which then actually takes place—is sufficiently denoted.

15.—Baptism in the name of Christ.

If, however, it had to be admitted that there was a time when the Apostles baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ alone, we must regard it as certain that they did so by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in order that in the infancy of the Church, their preaching might be rendered more remarkable by the name of Jesus, and His divine and immense power better known. Nay, if we look closely into the matter, we shall easily perceive that not one of the parts prescribed by our Saviour is missing in that form; for he who mentions Jesus Christ implies also the Person of the Father by whom He was anointed, and at that of the Holy Ghost in whom He was anointed.

16.—It is doubtful if any such form was ever used by the Apostles.

At the same time it may well seem doubtful whether the Apostles baptized anyone with the form in question, if we accept the opinion of Ambrose and Basil, holy and authoritative Fathers, who interpret "Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ" to mean, not the Baptism given by John, but the Baptism instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ; for according to this opinion the Apostles did not depart from the common and usual form which comprises the distinct names of the Three Persons. Now this is the meaning that St. Paul seems to have had in view, when he says in his Epistle to the Galatians: *As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ*[1]—meaning they were baptized in the faith of Christ, yet with no other form than that which our Lord and Saviour commanded to be observed.

17.—The ablution. How made?

This much will be sufficient to teach the faithful regarding the matter and form which are essential to the substance of Baptism. But as in the administrations of this sacrament the proper sort of ablution should be observed, the doctrine on this head also should be expounded by the pastor, and he should briefly show that, in accordance with the common custom and practice of the Church,

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[1] Gal. iii. 27.

Baptism can be conferred in any one of three ways. Those who are to be baptized are either immersed in the water, or the water is poured on them, or they are sprinkled with water. No matter which of these three rites is observed, we must believe that Baptism is truly administered. For, water is used in Baptism to signify the washing of the soul which it effects—hence the name *laver* [1] given it by the Apostle. But ablution does not more really take place when a person is immersed in water—a practice which we know to have been long observed in the early Church—than by the effusion of water which we now see is the common custom, or by aspersion which, as we gather, was practised by St. Peter, who in one day converted and baptized three thousand men.

18.—Three-fold ablution.

As to whether the ablution be performed once or thrice is a matter of indifference. It is sufficiently clear from the letter of St. Gregory the Great to Leander, that Baptism was formerly administered both ways in the early Church, and that the same may still be done validly. That rite, however, must be retained by the faithful which each one finds in use in his own country.

19.—The ablution to be made on the head.

But the pastor must especially show that ablution is not to be applied to any part of the body at random, but principally to the head, in which all the senses, internal and external, have their seat: and also that the words of the sacrament, i.e., the form, must be pronounced by the person baptizing, neither before nor after the ablution but at the self-same time as the ablution.

II.—THE INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM

20.—The institution of Baptism.

After this it will be well to teach and direct the attention of the faithful to the fact that Baptism, like the other sacraments, was instituted by Christ our Lord. The pastor, then, will frequently dwell on this, and will explain that two different periods are to be noted in reference to Baptism—the one when our Saviour instituted it, the other when the law concerning its reception was promulgated.

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[1] Tit. iii. 5.

With regard to the first it is clear that this sacrament was instituted by our Lord when He Himself, on being baptized by John, gave to water the power of sanctifying. St. Gregory and St. Augustine testify that it was precisely then that the power of generating to spiritual life was imparted to water. Augustine writes elsewhere: "From the moment that Christ was immersed in the water, water washes away all sins;" and in another passage: "The Lord is baptized, not because He needed to be cleansed, but in order that by the touch of His pure body He might cleanse the waters and give them the power of cleansing."

A very strong argument to the same effect may be found in the fact that the Blessed Trinity in whose name Baptism is conferred, manifested their divine presence on that occasion. The voice of the Father was heard; the Person of the Son was there; the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove; while the heavens to which we may now ascend through Baptism were thrown open.[1]

But should anyone desire to know how so great and divine a power was imparted by our Lord to water, this indeed, surpasses the understanding of man. Yet this we do know, that, on our Lord being baptized, the water was consecrated to the saving use of Baptism by contact with His most pure and holy body. But although instituted before His passion, yet we are to believe that Baptism derived all its force and efficacy from the passion, which was the consummation, so to say, of all the actions of Christ.

21.—The promulgation of the obligation of Baptism.

As for the other point—the time when the law regarding Baptism became obligatory—there can be no doubt. Sacred writers are unanimous in holding that when, after the resurrection, our Lord gave the command to His Apostles: *Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,*[2] from that precise moment all men who were to attain eternal salvation began to be bound by the law of Baptism. This is inferred from the authority of the Prince of the Apostles, when he says: *He hath regenerated us into a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;*[3] as also from the passage of St. Paul: *He delivered Himself up for it* (speaking of the Church) *cleansing it by the laver of water in the word.*[4] Both passages seem to refer the obligation of Baptism to the time immediately following our Lord's death; so that there can be no doubt whatever that the words of our Saviour: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,*[1] refer also to the time subsequent to the passion.

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[1] Matt. iii. 16. [2] Matt. xxviii. 19. [3] 1 Peter i. 3. [4] Eph. v. 25.

22.—Veneration due to the sacrament of Baptism.

If all this is accurately treated by the pastor, the faithful will assuredly be led to recognize and devoutly venerate the exalted dignity of this sacrament, especially when they reflect that to each one, on being baptized, are given and bestowed by the invisible power of the Holy Ghost those choice and abundant gifts which were manifested by miracles on the occasion of the Baptism of Christ. Now, were our eyes so opened, as happened to the servant of Eliseus, as to enable us to behold heavenly things, no one can be imagined so devoid of common sense as not to be filled with the greatest admiration for the mysteries of Baptism; why, then, should we not expect a like result, when the riches of this sacrament shall have been unfolded by the pastor in such a way that the faithful may be able to behold them, if not with the eyes of the body, yet with the keen vision of the soul illuminated with the light of faith?

III.—THE MINISTERS OF BAPTISM

23.—The ministers of Baptism.

In the next place it seems not only useful, but also necessary, to mention who are the ministers by whom this sacrament is administered, in order that those to whom the office is principally entrusted may strive to discharge it holily and devoutly, and that no one may presume to outstep his own province and unseasonably enter on or arrogantly intrude himself into another's office—all things, the Apostle admonishes, should be done *according to order.*[2]

In the case in question the faithful should be taught that there is a triple order of ministers. In the first are to be reckoned bishops and priests, to whom it has been given to exercise this office in their own right and not by any special permission. To them, in the persons of the Apostles, was addressed the command: *Go and baptize.* Lest, however, they should be compelled to neglect the more weighty charge of instructing the people, bishops have been accustomed to leave the administration of Baptism to priests. At the same time it is clear from the teaching of the Fathers, and the practice of the Church, that priests exercise this function in their own right, so much so that they may administer Baptism even in the presence of the bishop. Ordained as they are to consecrate the Blessed Eucharist, which is the sacrament of peace and unity, it was but fitting that power should be given them to do all that is necessary to enable their fellow-man to become a sharer in that peace and unity. If, however, the Fathers sometimes state that the right to baptize without leave of the bishops is not given to priests, it would seem that this applies to that Baptism which was administered with special pomp on certain days of the year.

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[1] John iii. 5.

[2] I Cor. xiv. 40.

Deacons come next as ministers. Numerous decrees of the Fathers testify that, without consent of the bishop or priest, it was not lawful for them to administer this sacrament.

The lowest rank is that of those who can baptize in case of necessity, but without the solemn ceremonies. In this number are included all, whether men or women, no matter to what sect they belong. For, in case of necessity, this function is permitted even to Jews, infidels, and heretics, with the sole proviso that they intend to do what the Catholic Church does in that act of her ministry. Many decrees of the ancient Fathers and of the Councils have confirmed this; while the holy Council of Trent pronounces anathema against those who should dare to say that "that Baptism is not a true Baptism which is given, even by heretics, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, with the intention of doing what the Church does." In this we may truly admire the boundless goodness and wisdom of our Lord, who, having made the reception of this sacrament obligatory on all, and having, as He did, appointed water as its matter, than which nothing is more common, in like manner willed that no one should be excluded from its administration, although, as already remarked, all are not permitted to use its solemn ceremonies. Not that the rites of ceremonies are of greater dignity, but because they are less necessary than the sacrament.

24.—Order to be observed in administering the sacrament

The faithful, however, must not imagine that this office is indiscriminately permitted to all in such a manner as to dispense with the propriety of observing a certain precedence amongst its ministers. If a man is present a woman should not attempt the administration of the sacrament; if an ecclesiastic be present a layman should not; if a priest be present a simple ecclesiastic should not. At the same time, midwives who are accustomed to baptize are not to be censured, if sometimes, in the presence of a man who has no practice in the administration of this sacrament, they were to perform what would otherwise seem to belong more properly to men.

IV.—THE SPONSORS

25.—Sponsors. Besides the ministers who, as already pointed out, administer Baptism, there is another class of persons who, according to a most ancient practice in the Church, are admitted to take part in the performance of this holy and saving function. By writers on divine things they were formerly commonly called undertakers, sponsors, or sureties, and are now called godfathers or godmothers. As to their office, belonging, as it does, to almost all the laity, the pastor should explain it accurately, so as to show the faithful all that is principally necessary for its proper performance.

And first he should show how it is that, at Baptism, besides the ministers of the sacrament, godfathers and sponsors are required. The extreme fitness of their presence will be apparent to all who remember that Baptism is a spiritual regeneration by which we are born children of God. Of this new birth St. Peter thus speaks: *As new-born infants, desire the rational milk without guile.*[1] Just, therefore, as, when born into the world, an infant needs a nurse and instructor by whose help and attention he is brought up and formed to learning and useful knowledge; so in like manner it is required that those who, at the baptismal font, begin to live a spiritual life, should be entrusted to the fidelity and prudence of some one from whom they may imbibe the precepts of the Christian religion, and be brought up in all holiness, and thus gradually grow up in Christ until at last, by God's help, they reach perfect Christian manhood. More especially are sponsors required for this reason, that pastors who have the public care and charge of parishes have insufficient time to enable them to undertake the individual instruction of children in the faith. As to the antiquity of this custom we have the remarkable testimony of St. Denis: "It occurred to our divine leaders [thus he calls the Apostles], and they resolved to admit infants to Baptism, but in this holy manner that the natural parents of a child should entrust him to the care of one learned in divine matters who should be his teacher, and under whom, as under a divine father and guardian of his holy salvation, the child should lead the remainder of his life." This is confirmed by the authority of Hyginus.

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[1] 1 Peter ii. 2.

26.—Spiritual affinity arising therefrom.

Wisely, then, has it been ordained by the Church, that not only he who baptizes contracts an affinity with the person baptized, but also the sponsor with the godchild and its natural parents, with the result that between all such persons marriage cannot be contracted, or if contracted is null and void.

27.—Duties of sponsors.

The faithful should also be instructed in the duties of sponsors. So carelessly is this office undertaken in the Church that only the bare name of the function is left—of the sanctity it implies, men do not seem to have the faintest idea. In general, then, sponsors should always bear in mind that they are specially bound to exercise a constant vigilance over their spiritual children, and to take particular care that in all that pertains to the formation of a Christian life they may ever prove themselves to be such as their sponsors promised in the solemn ceremony. On this subject let us hear St Denis interpreting the words of the sponsor: " I promise to train up this child, by my ceaseless instruction, as soon as he shall arrive at a knowledge of things sacred, to renounce all that is opposed to, and to profess and perform, the promise he now makes." St Augustine also says: " I specially warn you, both men and women, who have acted as sponsors in Baptism, to bear in mind that you have become sureties in the sight of God for those whom you received at the holy font." It certainly is highly becoming that he who undertakes an office should be indefatigable in the diligent discharge of it; and that he who promised to be the guide and teacher of another should never allow him to be deserted when he has once received him under his charge and protection, as long as he knows him to stand in need of help and care. Speaking of the office of sponsors, St Augustine in a few words sums up all the lessons they should impart to their spiritual children: " They should," he says, " admonish them to observe chastity, love justice, preserve charity; and above all they should teach them the Creed and Lord's Prayer, as also the Commandments and the first rudiments of the Christian religion."

28.—Who may not be sponsors. This being the case, we readily see to what sort of men the administration of this holy sponsorship should not be entrusted—that is, to those who will not discharge it faithfully or who cannot do so diligently and carefully. Wherefore, setting aside the natural parents who may not undertake this office (showing thereby how much this spiritual training is different from the carnal), in the first place heretics, Jews, and infidels are altogether to be excluded from this office, for this reason, that their thoughts and cares are ever directed to the obscuring of the truths of faith by falsehood and the subverting of all Christian piety.

29.—The number of sponsors. It is decided by the Council of Trent that the sponsors for any one infant should not be numerous, but simply one godfather or one godmother, or at the most a godfather and godmother, the reason being that the proper order of discipline and instruction might be confused by a number of teachers, and also because it was necessary to guard against the multiplication of affinities which would impede the wider diffusion of society by means of lawful marriage.

V.—NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

30.—Baptism necessary to all. Now, if a knowledge of all that has been explained up to this be regarded as exceedingly important to the faithful, assuredly it is no less important for them to learn that the law of Baptism is so strictly imposed by our Lord on all men, that unless they be born again to God through the grace of Baptism, they are born of their parents only to eternal misery and perdition, be those parents Christian or infidel. The pastor should, therefore, frequently expound the gospel words: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*[1]

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[1] John iii. 5.

31.—Infants to be baptized.

That this law applies not only to adults but also to children and infants, and that the Church has received this from Apostolic tradition is confirmed by the unanimous doctrine and authority of the Fathers. We cannot but believe that Christ our Lord did not will that the sacrament and grace of Baptism should be denied to children, concerning whom He said: *Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;*[1] whom, too, He embraced, laid His hands on, and blessed.[2] And when we read that a whole family was baptized by Paul, it is natural to suppose that the children also who belonged to that family were baptized.[3] Circumcision also, which was a figure of Baptism, strongly favours the custom; for, as everyone knows, children were circumcised on the eight day after birth. Now if circumcision *made by hand, in despoiling of the body of the flesh,*[4] was profitable to children, it is evident that Baptism, which is Christ's circumcision, not *made by hand,* is also profitable to them. Lastly, according to the teaching of the Apostle: *If by one man's offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ.*[5] Since, then, by the sin of Adam, children inherit original sin, much more should they through Christ our Lord attain grace and justice to reign unto life, which cannot be effected without Baptism.

Hence the pastor will teach that infants are unhesitatingly to be baptized, and that their tender minds are to be formed later on, little by little, to true devotion by the precepts of the Christian religion. As the wise man has well said: *A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.*[6]

32.—Infants receive grace in Baptism.

Nor can we doubt but that they receive the gifts of faith on being baptized; not indeed that they believe with the assent of the mind, but because they are established in the faith of their parents if their parents belong to the number of the faithful; if not (to use St. Augustine's words), then in the faith of the whole company of the saints. For we may truly say that they are presented for Baptism by all those who desire to see them presented, and by whose charity they are admitted to the communion of the Holy Ghost.

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[1] Matt. xix. 14. [2] Mark x. 16. [3] 1 Cor. i. 16 [4] Col. ii. 11. [5] Rom. v. 17.
[6] Prov. xxii. 6.

33.—Baptism of infants should not be deferred.

The faithful should also earnestly be exhorted to take care that their children are brought to the church, as soon as it is possible to do so without danger, and baptized with the usual solemn ceremonies. There being no other means of salvation open to infants, except Baptism, it will readily be understood how great is the guilt incurred by those who suffer them to be deprived of the grace of that sacrament longer than necessity requires, especially as on account of their tender age, they are exposed to almost countless dangers of death.

34.—Baptism of adults.

The practice of the ancient Church shows that a different method should be observed in the case of those who are adults and who enjoy the perfect use of reason, such, for instance, as those who are born of infidel parents. To such the Christian faith has to be explained, and they must be earnestly exhorted, persuaded, and invited to embrace it. And if they are converted to the Lord our God, then they must be admonished not to defer their Baptism beyond the time prescribed by the Church. Since it is written: *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day,*[1] they are to be shown that true conversion consists in regeneration by Baptism; that the longer they delay Baptism so much the longer will they be deprived of the grace and use of the other sacraments which are the soul of the Christian religion, and which are unattainable without Baptism, and that they are deprived of the choice fruits which Baptism confers. The water of Baptism not only washes and removes the stains and marks of all sins previously committed, but also adorns us with divine grace, by the aid and assistance of which we are enabled to avoid sin, and preserve justice and innocence in which two things all will readily understand the sum of Christian life consists.

35.—Adults are to be prepared for some time.

Though this is so, nevertheless the Church has not been accustomed to confer Baptism on this class of persons immediately, but has decided that it should be deferred for a certain time. This delay does not imply the same danger which, as we have pointed out, impends over infants—should any sudden accident happen to hinder adults from being baptized in the saving water, endowed as they are, with the use of reason their intention and resolution to receive Baptism and their repentance for their past sins will avail to grace and justification. On the other hand this delay seems to present certain advantages. And first, as the Church must be very careful that no one approach this sacrament through hypocrisy and dissimulation, the intentions of those who seek Baptism are better examined and ascertained. Hence we find it decreed by the ancient Councils that Jews converted to the Catholic faith were to remain amongst the Catechumens for some months before being admitted to Baptism. Secondly, they are better instructed in the truths of that faith which they are to profess, and in the practices of Christian life. And thirdly, greater religious reverence is shown to the sacrament when administered to adults with solemn ceremony on the appointed days of Easter and Pentecost.

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[1] Ecclus. v. 8.

36.—Baptism of adults not always to be deferred.

Occasionally, however,—for a just and necessary cause—the time of Baptism is not to be deferred, as, for instance, where there seems to be imminent danger to life, especially where those to be baptized are already well instructed in the mysteries of faith. This was done by Philip and the Prince of the Apostles, when the one baptized the eunuch of Queen Candace, the other Cornelius, and that without any delay and as soon as they proposed to embrace the faith.

VI.—DISPOSITIONS FOR BAPTISM

37.—Dispositions for Baptism.

It should also be taught and explained to the people how those to be baptized should be disposed.

First of all they must desire and intend to receive Baptism; for as in Baptism each one dies to sin and undertakes to lead a new life, it is but fit that Baptism should be administered to no one that is unwilling to receive it or who refuses to receive it, but to those only who freely and readily receive it. Hence we know from holy tradition that it has always been the practice that Baptism should be administered to no one without his being previously asked whether he wished it. Even in children it is not to be supposed that that will is wanting since the will of the Church which answers in their place cannot be mistaken.

38.—Baptism of insane persons.

Furthermore, it should be taught that the insane and the mad who were once of sound mind and have subsequently fallen into insanity, and who at that time had no intention of receiving Baptism, are not to be baptized unless in danger of death. When such danger is present they are to be baptized provided they showed any signs of such wish previous to their insanity, otherwise Baptism is not to be administered. The same remark applies to those that are unconscious. If, however, the insane were never of sound mind, never enjoyed the use of reason, they are to be baptized in the faith of the Church, just like children before the use of reason.

39.—Other requisites for Baptism of adults.

But besides the desire of being baptized, faith is also very necessary to obtain the grace of the sacrament, for the same reason as has been already given for having the intention Our Lord and Saviour has taught: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*[1]

In the second place, it is necessary that each one should repent of his sins and of his ill-spent life, and resolve to avoid all sin for the future. He that desires Baptism and is unwilling to correct his habit of sinning is unhesitatingly to be rejected; nothing is so contrary to the grace and efficacy of Baptism as the mind and intention of those who never think of putting any end to sinning. Now, since Baptism should be sought with the object of putting on Christ and being united to Him, it is clear that he who purposes to remain in sin and vice should justly be rejected from holy Baptism, particularly as none of those things which pertain to Christ and His Church are to be received in vain; and since, as far as sanctifying and saving grace are concerned we are well aware that Baptism will be unavailing to him who purposes to *walk according to the flesh and not according to the spirit,*[2] even though, as regards the sacrament itself, the person who is duly baptized, provided he intends to receive what the holy Church administers, undoubtedly receives the sacrament validly. Hence the Prince of the Apostles thus answered that great multitude who, Holy Scripture relates, in compunction of heart asked him and the other Apostles what they should do: *Do penance and be baptized, every one of you;*[3] and in another passage: *Be penitent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*[4] And St. Paul writing to the Romans plainly shows that he who is baptized should entirely die to sin; and hence he warns us not to yield our *members as instruments of iniquity unto sin, but present* ourselves *to God as those that are alive from the dead.*[1]

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[1] Mark xvi. 16. [2] Rom. viii. 4. [3] Acts ii. 38. [4] Acts iii. 19.

40.—Advantage to be derived from these considerations.

Now, if the faithful frequently meditate on these points they will be led, first, earnestly to admire the infinite goodness of God, who, out of His own pure mercy alone, has bestowed upon us, who little deserved such mercy, a blessing so special and so divine as that of Baptism; and, secondly, when they put before their eyes how free from sin should be the lives of those who are blessed with so great a gift, they will easily see that it is specially required of every Christian to strive to spend each day of his life as holily and religiously as if he had received the sacrament and grace of Baptism that very day.

To inflame the soul, however, to the pursuit of true piety nothing is more profitable than for the pastor to give an accurate explanation of the effects of Baptism.

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[1] Rom. vi. 13.

BAPTISM

1. Nature and Effects of Baptism

Q. What is the sacrament of Baptism ?

A. Baptism is a sacrament by which we are born again to the grace of God, and become Christians.

Q. What are the effects of the sacrament of Baptism ?

A. The sacrament of Baptism confers *first* sanctifying grace by which original sin is washed away, as well as all actual sin if any such exists ; it remits all punishment due on account of such sins ; it imprints the character of a Christian ; it makes us children of God, members of the Church, and heirs to Paradise, and enables us to receive the other sacraments.

Q. What is the matter of Baptism ?

A. The matter of Baptism is natural water which is poured on the head of the person to be baptized in such a quantity as to flow.

Q. What is the form of Baptism ?

A. The form of Baptism is : *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

2. Minister of Baptism

Q. To whom does it belong to confer Baptism ?

A. To confer Baptism belongs by right to bishops and parish priests; but in case of necessity any person, whether man or woman, even a heretic or an infidel, can administer it, provided he carries out the rite of Baptism, and has the intention of doing what the Church does.

Q. If it were necessary to baptize a person in danger of death, and if several people were present, who should administer the sacrament ?

A. If it were necessary to baptize a person in danger of death, and if several people were present, a priest, if such were at hand, should adminsteir the sacrament, and in his absence one of the inferior clergy; and in the absence of such, a layman in preference to a woman, unless in the case in which the greater skill, on the part of the woman, or the claims of propriety; should demand otherwise.

Q. What intention should the person baptizing have ?

A. The person baptizing should have the intention of doing what Holy Church does in baptizing.

3. The Rite of Baptism and the Disposition of the Adult who Receives it

Q. How is Baptism given ?

A. Baptism is given by pouring water on the head of the person to be baptized—and if it cannot be poured on the head, then on some other principal part of the body—saying at the same time : "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Q. If one were to pour the water and another to pronounce the words would the person be baptized?

A. If one poured the water and another said the words the person would not be baptized; but it is necessary that the person who pours the water should pronounce the words.

Q. In doubt whether the person is dead, is it right to omit baptizing him?

A. In doubt whether the person is dead, he should be baptized conditionally, saying: "If thou art alive I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Q. When should infants be brought to the Church to be baptized?

A. Infants should be brought to the Church to be baptized as soon as possible.

Q. Why such anxiety to have infants receive Baptism?

A. There should be the greatest anxiety to have infants baptized, because on account of their tender age they are exposed to many dangers of death, and cannot be saved without Baptism.

Q. Do parents sin, then, who, through negligence, allow their children to die without Baptism, or who defer it?

A. Yes, fathers and mothers who, through negligence, allow their children to die without Baptism sin grievously, because they deprive their children of eternal life; and they also sin grievously by putting off Baptism for a long time, because they expose them to danger of dying without having received it.

Q. When the person who is being baptized is an adult, what dispositions should he have?

A. An adult who is being baptized, besides faith, should have at least imperfect contrition for the mortal sins he may have committed.

Q. If an adult in mortal sin was baptized without such sorrow, what would he receive?

A. If an adult was baptized in mortal sin without such sorrow he would receive the character of Baptism, but not the remission of his sins nor sanctifying grace. And these two effects would be suspended, until the obstacle is removed by perfect contrition or by the sacrament of Penance.

4 NECESSITY OF BAPTISM AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE BAPTIZED

Q. Is Baptism necessary to salvation?

A. Baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation, for our Lord has expressely said: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

Q. Can the absence of Baptism be supplied in any other way?

A. The absence of Baptism can be supplied by martyrdom, which is called Baptism of Blood, or by an act of perfect love of God, or of contrition, along with the desire, at least implicit, of Baptism, and this is called Baptism of Desire.

Q. To what is the person baptized bound?

A. The person baptized is bound to always profess the faith and observe the Law of Jesus Christ and of His Church.

Q. In receiving holy Baptism what do we renounce?

A. In receiving holy Baptism we renounce, for ever, the devil, his works and pomps.

Q. What is meant by the works and pomps of the devil?

A. By the works and pomps of the devil we mean sin and the maxims of the world that are contrary to the maxims of the Gospel.

5. Names and Sponsors

Q. Why is the name of a saint given to him who is being baptized?

A. To him who is being baptized is given the name of a saint in order to put him under the protection of a heavenly patron and to animate him to imitate that saint's example.

Q. Who are the godfathers and godmothers in Baptism?

A. The godfathers and godmothers in Baptism are those persons who in accordance with the decree of the Church hold the infants at the font, answer for them, and become guarantees in the sight of God for their Christian education, especially in the absence of the parents.

Q. Are we obliged to keep the promises and renunciations made for us by our sponsors?

A. We are certainly obliged to observe the promises and renunciations made for us by our sponsors, because it is only on this condition that God has received us into His grace.

Q. What sort of persons should be chosen as godfathers and godmothers?

A. There should be chosen as godfathers and godmothers Catholics of good life, and obedient to the laws of the Church.

Q. What are the obligations of godfathers and godmothers?

A. Godfathers and godmothers are bound to see that their spiritual children are instructed in the truths of faith, and live as good Christians, and they should edify them by their good example.

Q. What tie do sponsors contract in Baptism?

A. Sponsors contract a spiritual relationship with the baptized and with the parents of the baptized, which causes an impediment to marriage with these persons.

Third Instruction on the Sacraments

BAPTISM: ITS NATURE AND PARTS

HAVING explained the sacraments of the Church in general, I now come to the explanation of each one of them in particular, and I commence with Baptism which is the first, the most necessary, and, to use the expression of the Fathers, the gate of all the other sacraments; for no one can receive the others validly unless he is a Christian, and he becomes a Christian by means of holy Baptism alone.

True, indeed, all of us here present have already received this sacrament, nor can we ever receive it again; nevertheless this should not hinder us from speaking about it. Having in fact received it at an age in which we were incapable of recognizing either its dignity and excellence, or the wondrous effects it produces in us, or the strict obligations we contracted thereby, it becomes important to bring it home to our minds from time to time, in order to be fully alive to the considerations it involves, and thence be encouraged to live grateful and thankful to God for this great benefit, and faithful to the grace which it confers, and for which each of us shall one day have to render a strict account.

In addition to this, it may easily happen that the salvation of an infant in danger of death may be committed to us by God. Hence it is necessary that all, both men and women, should know how to baptize, and what are the essential parts of that sacrament.

What, then, does the word *baptism* mean? In a general way it signifies any kind of washing; but it is used by the Church to signify the act of washing a person who is being made a Christian, while at the same time certain words ordained by Christ are pronounced by the person baptizing. Hence Baptism is a sacrament of regeneration instituted by Christ, in which by means of an outward washing of the body, applied along with certain definite words, is signified and produced the inward washing of the soul which is accomplished by the Holy Ghost.

Instituted by Christ—When? Although it was only after His resurrection that He commanded the Apostles to go forth into the whole world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, nevertheless the Roman Catechism, in accordance with the teaching of the Fathers, lays down that Christ instituted it when He was baptized by St John in the Jordan. "He willed to be baptized," says St. Augustine, "not because He stood in need of it, for He was innocence and holiness itself, but to sanctify the waters by the contact of His holy body and give them the power to cleanse souls from sin." And it was precisely at that moment, proceeds the Catechism, that the Holy Trinity, in whose name Baptism is conferred, was explicitly manifested; for at that moment the voice of the heavenly Father was heard uttering these words to His Son: *This is my beloved Son*;[1] that divine Son was present; and the Holy Ghost descended on Him in the form of a dove. Then it was that the heavens were opened, and their doors were unfolded to us by means of holy Baptism.

Let us now examine the parts necessary to constitute this sacrament. The matter of the sacrament is true natural water—*Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost*, says our Lord, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*[2]—such as rain-water, water from wells, rivers, or pools, provided only it has not been altered in such a way as to lose the nature of water. Hence it cannot be artificial water, such as that distilled from flowers; much less can it be any of the various liquors, which have not even the name of water, nor can it be wine, beer, or milk. The practice of the Church is to use water that is not only clean but also blessed and set apart for this special purpose. This, however, does not pertain to the essence of the sacrament, for the validity of which ordinary natural water is sufficient.

The water should be applied after the manner of washing, and can be done in three ways—by immersion, by effusion, and by aspersion. By immersion, that is, by dipping or immersing the infant in water; by effusion, that is, by pouring water over the infant, and this is the common practice; by aspersion, that is, by sprinkling the infant with water—a practice no longer in use. In whichever of these three ways Baptism is conferred it is good and valid; but in solemn Baptism it is becoming to follow the local custom.

It is not, however, necessary to wash the whole body—it is sufficient to wash the principal part of the body which is the head; and if that is impossible, then any other available part, taking good care, however, to remember, that Baptism which has not been conferred on the head is at least doubtful, and should therefore be repeated conditionally as soon as possible. But in all cases it is necessary to pour the water in such a quantity that it can flow, and not merely to apply a drop; for it is one thing to wash and quite another thing simply to moisten. In order to have a real washing there is required either a continuous application of the body to the water, as is done in immersion, or a continuous application of the water to the body, as is had in Baptism by effusion.

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[1] Matt. iii. 17.

[2] John iii. 5.

This washing must be accompanied by the words prescribed by Christ, which constitute the form of the sacrament. Now, what are these words? In solemn Baptism they are uttered in Latin; but, as Baptism is valid, no matter what the language used, you should at all times remember the form in English, which is: *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* It was Jesus Christ Himself who taught us this form, when He said to the Apostles: *Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*[1]

Three things must necessarily be expressed in order to secure the substance of the form—the act of baptizing, the person being baptized, and each of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity by name. Hence it is that all these words, *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,* are essential. If the word *thee* is left out, the person who is being baptized is not designated; if the words *I baptize* are omitted, the action of baptizing is not signified; while if the remaining words are wanting, there is no distinct invocation of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and Baptism conferred in the name of the Trinity would not be valid without distinguishing the Persons.

Two other points should be borne in mind. First, the matter and form must be applied by the one who applies the water. Hence the Baptism would be invalid if one person were to pour the water, and another to pronounce the form. Secondly, the matter and form must be morally united so as to form one single action—that is, the words should not be finished before the water is poured, nor the water poured before commencing the words. It must not be understood that a perfect coincidence between the two is necessary, but they should overlap each other at some point.

What should you do, then, if you had to baptize an infant? You should take natural water, even water that is not blessed, if the latter is not available at the moment, and pour it over the head of the infant to be baptized, or, if it is not possible to pour it over the head, then over the principal available part of the body, saying at the same time as you pour the water: *I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,* and having the intention to baptize, or at least to do as the Church does.

From this it will be clear that anyone can be the minister of the sacrament of Baptism. True, indeed, if we speak of solemn Baptism administered with the rites and ceremonies of the Church, it pertains to the Bishop, the parochial clergy, and, with special leave, to a deacon. But if we speak of private Baptism, which is conferred in case of necessity, anyone at all, even an unbeliever, can always validly and lawfully administer it, provided there is necessity, without which such an act would be an intrusion, a usurpation, rendering it, if not invalid, at least unlawful.

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[1] Matt. xxviii. 19.

Even in case of necessity a certain order should be observed, giving the precedence to a priest in preference to a layman, and to a man in preference to a woman, except in certain cases, when it would be well to entrust the administration of the sacrament to the most skilful, so as to avoid all danger of rendering the sacrament null. But, let us repeat, any person, of any condition, of any sect or religion, even a heretic, schismatic, or unbeliever, can confer it validly. The Church has always regarded Baptism conferred by heretics as valid, provided it is certain that they had used the proper matter and form. The divine providence and mercy of Jesus Christ, the Author of the sacraments, has so ordained this, to lessen, as far as possible, the danger of children departing this life without a sacrament of such vital necessity. In order to render it easy, He has established as matter one of the commonest of things, water; as form, a few words that can be learned even by the most ignorant; and as minister, any person who has arrived at the use of reason.

And in fact this sacrament is necessary, with that absolute necessity called by theologians necessity of *means*, that is to say, so necessary, that the loss of it, even through no fault of one's own, excludes one from eternal salvation. And surely an infant who cannot receive it cannot be considered to be in fault; and yet, by the fact that he has not received it, he is excluded from the kingdom of heaven, according to the words of our Lord to Nicodemus: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*[1]

I do not now intend to discuss the fate or the precise condition of those children who die before they have received Baptism. What is certain and of faith is, according to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, that, dying without Baptism, they are separated for ever from God and deprived of the Beatific Vision. And as this is the greatest of all misfortunes—and one, moreover, that is easily incurred by infants, whose life is so frail and exposed to so many unforeseen accidents—parents should be most careful to bring their children, as soon as possible, to the church to be baptized, which is the only means of their salvation. So important is this duty that in some places excommunication was incurred by those parents who deferred the Baptism for more than a week.

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[1] John iii. 5.

Great, however, as is the necessity of Baptism, it is certain, according to the teaching of the Church, that it can be supplied in two other ways—by *desire*, and by *martyrdom*.

First, by *desire*—a kind of Baptism which applies to adults only. If an unbaptized adult, finding himself at the point of death, or even at any other time, has a lively contrition for his sins, along with an ardent desire of receiving Baptism, his desire, accompanied by charity, would accomplish in him what the sacrament accomplishes. And in fact the Church has always looked favourably on the eternal salvation of those catechumens who, while seriously preparing to receive Baptism, were cut off by sudden death. Nor would it be useless even for us to conceive such a desire; for this reason, that while Catholics born of Christian parents and in Christian countries have usually no reason for doubt as to the Baptism received by them, yet no one can be infallibly certain that he has been validly baptized. True, a faint doubt of the kind should not be allowed to trouble us; but at the same time each one is wisely advised to excite in himself, now and then, the desire of being baptized, and renew an act of perfect love of God, with sincere sorrow for the sins he may have committed, and along with this the wish to be baptized in case the Baptism already received was null and void.

Secondly, by *martyrdom*—and this applies to both adults and infants. Hence if a child or an adult is put to death for the cause of Jesus Christ and His holy faith, that death holds for him the place of Baptism. Nor does it matter that a child is not able to suffer death for Jesus Christ with full knowledge of the cause, and with free act of the will—to be put to death even without knowing it is enough for God to be pleased to consider him a martyr and save him, as He saves other children by means of ordinary Baptism without their knowledge and without any consent of their will. Of this we have an example in the children the impious Herod put to death in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood on the occasion of the birth of Christ. The Church celebrates their feast and honours them as martyrs. In like manner also the Church honours as martyrs numbers of Gentiles who, in times of persecution, presented themselves before the tyrants, proclaimed themselves Christians and on that account suffered death even before they were baptized.

We can, then, distinguish three kinds of Baptism—of water, of blood, and of desire. This does not mean that there is not properly only one single Baptism, according to St. Paul's expression: *One faith, one Baptism*; for Baptism as a sacrament is only one, that is

Baptism of water, while the other two are not properly Baptisms nor sacraments conferring grace, but are improperly called Baptisms for this reason, that in defect of the Baptism of water, the other two take its place, and through the merciful disposition of God produce the same effect. Hence it is that an adult, justified by the Baptism of desire, is not dispensed thereby from receiving the Baptism of water ; just in the same way as a man who, by virtue of perfect contrition, has obtained pardon of his sins is not dispensed from the obligation of confession.

Thus far I have done little more than explain all that pertains to the valid administration of the sacrament of Baptism—considerations that can be useful to others in case you may have to confer it, but which do not directly concern yourselves, inasmuch as you have already received it. Other points of great importance which do concern us personally and closely remain to be explained, in reference to the effects of Baptism and the obligations contracted thereby. The subject, however, demands some time to be treated properly, and hence must be deferred to a future occasion.

Before concluding the present instruction I shall refer briefly to the office of godfather and godmother in the administration of Baptism—an office which is at one time required by you for your own children, at another assumed by you for the children of others.

This office imposes the duty of holding the child at the font, giving it a name, answering for it when it cannot reply to the questions put to it, and, above all, making oneself surety and sponsor before God for its Christian education, and supplying for the parents' negligence. Hence the name godfather and godmother, that is, second father and second mother ; and they are really spiritual fathers and mothers by reason of the spiritual generation which the infant acquires in the sacrament of Baptism, and from which also arises a spiritual relationship which they contract with the infant they hold at the sacred font and with its parents.

It is not, then, an office of mere formality nor an empty ceremony, but a real obligation contracted in the sight of God. Suppose that your godchild, either through his parents' fault or through misfortune, finds himself abandoned and deprived of all spiritual and even temporal assistance ; whose duty will it be to help him if not yours who assumed the office and put yourself in the closest relationship with him ?

From this arises a twofold duty—one on the part of those who have to select sponsors, and the other on the part of those who are so chosen.

In the selection of sponsors, parents should conform to the intructions and decrees of the Church, and aim principally at goodness of life, and not at the riches or name of the person chosen, or the temporal advantage that might be derived from him. If you do not blindly entrust money to every sort of person, much less should you entrust your children to persons of indifferent or scandalous lives and evil reputation.

On the other hand, those who are chosen for this office should not blindly undertake it without knowing and weighing well the obligation they assume. This should not, indeed, hinder you from assuming it, for it will always be a meritorious act of charity—nay of abundant charity to those poor parents who find themselves in difficulties, not knowing to whom to turn for help at such a moment. But you must have a pure intention, and above all guard against assuming that office for unworthy motives, and base or sinful aims.

I do not say this without reason. So great is the baseness of the world, that many freely offer themselves for this office in order to have a pretext for cultivating an intimacy with certain houses for unworthy motives as godfathers or gossips. Is it possible? Must a sacrament serve as a means to sin—as an instrument and a road to intrigues and low practices? Let us throw a veil over these sacrilegious proceedings—either do not assume the office at all, or assume it in the spirit of a true Christian.

The remaining ceremonies of the sacrament of Baptism, or at least the more remarkable, will be considered in the explanation of the two points referred to above—the effects which it works in us and the obligations we contract therein.

Fourth Instruction on the Sacraments

BAPTISM : THE OBLIGATIONS IT IMPOSES

BEFORE speaking of the obligations arising out of Baptism, it is necessary to remind you that they do not cease to possess all their binding force owing to the fact that they were assumed at a tender age without one's knowledge and will. Even unbelievers, and indeed all men who have the use of reason, are bound to observe the divine natural law of the Decalogue which includes many obligations, and those neither small nor light ; while if we consider the other positive duties imposed specially on us by Christianity, who is there who could complain of having received a glorious gift unconsciously, simply because of some slight inconvenience arising therefrom, though not for a moment to be compared with the gift itself ? Now, this is precisely the case in question. If we have contracted certain obligations, without our knowledge, we have on the other hand become children of God and heirs of Paradise ; but where is the comparison between these two things—between the burthens we have to bear and the unending, immense reward ?

Besides this, every time we perform an action proper to a Christian, do we not thereby simply ratify those conditions on which we acquired the right to perform it, and hence to be recognized as a Christian ?

This much being premised to meet certain difficulties that are sometimes made, I now pass on to consider the obligations imposed by the profession and character of Baptism.

In the first place it obliges us to believe in God, and in all the truths revealed by Him. Hence, before admitting us to Baptism, the priest more than once made enquiries as to our faith : " Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth ? Do you believe in Jesus Christ ? " and so on ; and through the mouths of our sponsors we answered : "I do believe."

Now, the faith that is demanded of us is not a mere indefinite faith—it is a firm, generous, efficacious faith. *Firm*, excluding all perplexity, hesitation, and doubt regarding the articles proposed for our belief. *Generous*, banishing all feeling of shame when we have to make public profession of it, no matter who is present, and no matter in what time or circumstances. *Efficacious*, corresponding in word and deed, and excluding us from the number of those censured by St. Paul because they confess God with their lips but deny Him with their deeds: *They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him.*[1] The lighted candle that the priest places in our hands after Baptism makes it sufficiently clear that the faith of a Christian should shine like a torch in the world, and shed around the living light of good example and of holiness.

But how can this be if we allow the world, the flesh, and the devil to acquire an evil influence over us? This leads us to speak of the solemn promise, demanded of and made by us through our sponsors, to renounce the devil, and the world and all its vanities: "Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his pomps?" And we answered: "I do renounce them"—a promise called by the holy Fathers to show its importance, an agreement, a contract made with God, a solemn oath sworn to Him, a vow even, and the greatest of all vows—"a promise," says St. Ambrose, "which was not only inscribed on the baptismal registers, but which was also written in the book of life, and the memory of which God will for ever preserve."

Now, in what does this promise precisely consist? In renouncing the devil we pledged ourselves never to return to his slavery by sin, and therefore never to entertain his vile suggestions, and vigorously to resist all the assaults of this insidious enemy who unceasingly urges us to do evil. And as for this purpose he very often tries to make use of our very selves and of our vicious passions, we also pledged ourselves at the same time to combat our evil passions and restrain our unregulated appetites and never allow ourselves to be conquered and subjected by them or him.

And in renouncing the world, what did we renounce? Was it houses, family, country, the companionship of our fellow-man, to bury ourselves in a desert? Oh, no. It is one thing to live in the world—another thing to live according to the world. We mean that world which is governed by maxims contrary to the Gospel—a world that revolves, as says St. John, on the three principal and baneful passions of pride, avarice, and lust; *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life*[2]—a world that is the declared enemy of Christ, and therefore censured and cursed by Him. Now this is precisely the world we have renounced—the precepts and maxims of the world, the manners and customs of the world, the disorders and corruptions of the world—in a word, all that is the world and goes under the name of the world.

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[1] Titus i. 16.

[2] 1 John ii. 16.

Now why is this renunciation of the world and of the devil demanded of us? Because to be on their side is incompatible with being on the side of God, to whom the grace of Baptism has specially and unreservedly bound us; because, as our Lord said, *no one can serve two masters*[1]—at one and the same time no one can serve God and the devil, God and the world, God and the flesh.

And in the third place the Christian faith embraced by us obliges us to live to God and for God, and to lead a pure, holy, immaculate life. For this one and only end, says St. Paul, He has by the grace of Baptism chosen us in preference to countless others: *He chose us . . . that we should be holy and immaculate in His sight.*[2] Hence the same Apostle, writing to the newly-baptized, calls them by no other name than that of *saints*,[3] just as if it was one and the same thing to be baptized and be a saint—to become a Christian and profess holiness.

So it is. The profession and the name of Christian is the profession and name of holiness and such holiness as becomes the character and high honours to which the grace of Baptism has raised us. Recall these to mind for a few moments, and contrast them with our obligations:—

1. By Baptism we are truly made children of God, and heirs of Paradise. We should, then, act towards God as true children, love Him as our Father, be obedient and subject to Him in all things—we should maintain the dignity of our lofty sonship by integrity of life, and not dishonour it by unworthy conduct; should be inspired with thoughts and aims becoming the high end to which we are called, and hence raise our desires towards heaven, and not keep our eyes fixed on this earth, like the beasts that have no other destiny.

2. By Baptism we have also become brothers of Jesus Christ, ingrafted on, incorporated in, Him. We should, then, strive to acquire the greatest possible resemblance to Him, to become, as it were, so many copies of Him, through humility, meekness, and every kind of Christian virtue, so that, to use the expression of St. Paul, the life of Jesus Christ may be made manifest and resplendent in our conduct: *That the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.*[4] Nor should this doctrine cause any suprise—is not the name Christian derived from Jesus Christ? It therefore means one who professes to embrace and follow the teaching and the example of Christ.

3. Finally by Baptism we have become *temples of the Holy Ghost*

[1] Matt. vi. 24. [2] Eph. i. 4. [3] 2 Cor. xiii. 12. [4] 2 Cor. iv. 10.

dwelling in us—we are consecrated to God by rites and ceremonies just the same as those used in the consecration of material temples—unctions, exorcisms, invocations. We should, then, regard and treat our souls and also our bodies as things sacred and consecrated, and hence preserve ourselves with inviolable purity, guard ourselves from every unbecoming thought, affection, and action, so that the spirit of God may be the principle, the motive, the rule of all our life and works: *Whosoever are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*[1]

And now do we understand what it is to be a Christian? In one word it means living, shining, active faith; it means war against Satan, separation from the world, mortification of ourselves, conformity with Jesus Christ, love of God, desire of heaven—there you have the duties and obligations of a Christian. Nor should a picture such as this seem strange or exaggerated unless to those who know nothing of the Gospel, since the Gospel is full of such maxims. On these terms, and on no other, the door of God's Church was opened to us, and the grace of holy Baptism imparted to us.

But if these are truly the obligations imposed on us by Baptism, are we not constrained to confess that few indeed are the true Christians? For as you know there are various classes of Christians.

Many, as a result of an unregulated and vicious life, and through downright malice, go so far as to cast off the faith, retaining nothing more of their Christianity than the baptismal character which can never be lost; then follows aversion to God's house, to the sacraments, to the word of God, to the ministers of religion, to all that is venerable and sacred. There remains no longer any trace of religion and faith. Speak to those of God, of the soul, of sin, of Paradise, of hell, of eternity—you will be treated with mockery and derision as fools and simpletons. Is not this a formal renunciation of Baptism, a real apostasy from Christianity?

Others there are who preserve the true belief, but cease to practise it at all; they are only half-Christians, for they are merely Christians in belief, in theory, in intellect, but not in will, in work, in life. And, in truth, had they promised in Baptism to serve the world, the flesh and the devil, could they behave differently from what they are now? No, indeed, for their life, instead of being Christian, is altogether the life of an unbeliever and idolator.

Finally, there are those, and they are the majority, who, striving to accomplish the impossible task of squaring God with the world, and conscience with the passions, reduce all their Christianity to a few purely material practices—visits to the church, to Mass, to Benediction and an occasional routine confession; but no true or solid piety. Their life is always in disorder, the soul always in an evil state, they are always far from God, and slaves of the world, now by one vice and now by another, now by one passion and now by another—shadows and ghosts of Christians with no real substance. Call them what you will, but God cannot recognize them as Christians. They are even in greater danger than the other two classes, who can have no doubt they are outside the road to heaven—a fact that may serve as a stimulus to awaken them; while the third class cherish a vain and presumptuous hope on the score of their devotions, closing their eyes completely to the many substantial defects that are dragging them down to hell.

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[1] Rom. viii. 14.

And now let us reflect for a moment how terrible will be the last great judgment for one who has been baptized and who has to present to the divine Judge nothing but the shameful abuse of so glorious a gift. Assuredly a Christian who leads an evil life is incomparably more guilty than an unbeliever, and this for many reasons:—(1) He shamefully dishonours the sublime dignity that distinguishes him in the sight of God, and thus his sins contract almost the nature of profanation and sacrilege, and undoubtedly involve an enormous excess of both abasement and ingratitude to God. (2) He breaks a solemn and sacred promise made to God, and hence acquires the evil character of liar, faithless and untrue. (3) He sins with greater knowledge and in face of the abundant aids, lights, and graces, with which Christianity copiously supplies him. The malice and the sin, then, being greater, greater also will be the punishment, and incomparably greater the load of damnation. Nay, according to the words of Jesus Christ, the very idolators will rise up one day to confound and condemn the Christian. *The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it.*[1] For if they had been illuminated, ennobled, privileged as we are, they would have corresponded far better than we do: *For if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sack-cloth and ashes.*[2] Hence idolators will be punished less severely, if for no other reason than because they have one sin less—the abuse of the lights and helps of the true religion.

In conclusion, here is the great point on which we should often and seriously reflect—that is on the strict and inviolable contract entered into by us, and on our consequent terrible responsibility before God. Let us then live ever mindful of His great mercy towards us, and let us seek to correspond thereto with fidelity.

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[1] Matt. xii. 41.

[2] Matt, xi. 21.

To stir up our torpid faith, the practice suggested by St. Charles Borromeo is excellent, and it is to place ourselves in spirit from time to time, and especially on the anniversary day of our Baptism, at the sacred font where we were regenerated, and there with lively faith say within ourselves: "Here, years ago, the Lord delivered me from the slavery of the devil; here He adopted me as His son, and made me heir to Paradise."

Thinking on this let us return Him thanks; let us call to mind the obligations we contracted; let us be filled with confusion and grief for having fulfilled them so imperfectly; and finally let us renew our promises and resolve to be more faithful for the future.

CHAPTER III

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM—(*continued*)

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

VII.—THE EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

41.—(*a*) The remission of sin.

REGARDING the effects of the sacrament of Baptism, they should be frequently explained in order that the faithful may more and more clearly realize the high dignity to which they have been raised, and never for a moment even allow themselves to be cast down therefrom by the wiles and assaults of the adversary. Accordingly they should be taught, first of all, that sin, whether contracted by birth from our first parents, or actually committed by ourselves, be it ever so abominable, even beyond the power of imagination, is remitted and pardoned by the wonderful power of this sacrament.

This effect was, ages before the Incarnation, foretold by the prophet Ezechiel, through whom the Lord God thus speaks: *I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness.* And the Apostle writing to the Corinthians[1] after having enumerated a long catalogue of their sins, adds: *Such some of you were, but you are washed, you are sanctified.*[2] This, too, is the constant teaching of the Church. St. Augustine, in his book on the Baptism of Infants, thus testifies: " By the generation of the flesh original sin alone is contracted; but by the regeneration of the spirit is remitted not only original, but also actual sin." And St. Jerome, in his letters to Oceanus, writes: " All sins are remitted in Baptism." And in order to remove all further doubt on the subject, the holy Council of Trent, following the definition of the other Councils, declared the same teaching, when it decreed anathema against all those who should presume to hold any other opinion, or who should assert that though sins are forgiven in Baptism, they are not entirely removed or utterly eradicated, but are merely effaced in such a way that their roots still remain fixed in the soul; for, to use the words of the same holy Council[1]: "In those who are regenerated, God hates nothing, because there remains nothing deserving of condemnation in those who are truly buried with Christ by Baptism unto death, and *who walk not according to the flesh*,[2] but *putting off the old man* and *putting on the new who is created according to God*,[3] are made innocent and immaculate, pure, upright, and beloved of God."

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[1] Ezech. xxxvi. 25.

[2] I Cor. vi. 11.

42.—The guilt of concupiscence is remitted, but concupiscence itself, or the tendency to sin, remains.

We must, however, confess, in accordance with the decree of the same holy Synod, that concupiscence or an inclination to sin remains. But it is not sin; for, as St. Augustine observes: "In baptized children the guilt of concupiscence is absolved, but concupiscence itself remains to be combated." He repeats the same statement elsewhere: "In Baptism the guilt of concupiscence is pardoned but the weakness remains." For, concupiscence which is an effect of sin is nothing else than an appetite of the soul, which appetite is, in its own nature, repugnant to reason, and which, nevertheless, if not accompanied by the consent of the will, or by negligence, is very far from having the nature of sin. And when St. Paul says: *I had not known concupiscence if the law did not say: Thou shalt not covet*,[4] he meant, not concupiscence itself, but the fault of the will. St. Gregory taught the same doctrine when he wrote: "If there are any who say that in Baptism sins are but superficially forgiven, what statement can be more untrue than this? For by the sacrament of Faith the soul adheres to God alone, and is freed from sins which are completely eradicated." In proof of this he adduces the testimony of our Saviour, who says in St. John: *He that is washed, needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly.*[5]

43.—Further proof.

Should anyone, however, desire to have a striking figure and image of Baptism, let him consider the story of Naaman, the Syrian leper, who, having washed seven times in the Jordan, was, according to the testimony of Scripture, so cleansed from his leprosy that his flesh became *like the flesh of a child*.[6]

The proper effect, then, of Baptism is the remission of all sins whether original or actual. That it is precisely for this object that it was instituted by our Lord and Saviour has been stated in the clearest terms by the Prince of the Apostles (to omit other testimonies): *Do penance*, he says, *and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins.*[1]

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[1] Sess. V., cap. v.
[2] Rom. viii. 1.
[3] Eph. iv. 22, 24.
[4] Rom. vii. 7.
[5] John xiii. 10.
[6] 4 Kings v. 14.

44.—(*b*) The punishment due to sin is also remitted.

But in Baptism not only are sins forgiven, but all the punishments due on account of sin are also mercifully remitted by God. For although it is common to all the sacraments to communicate the merits of Christ's passion, nevertheless it is of Baptism alone that the Apostle said that *by it we die with Christ, and with Christ are buried.*[2] Hence, holy Church has always taught that those works which the holy Fathers call works of satisfaction cannot, without inflicting grievous wrong on the sacrament, be imposed on him who is to be cleansed in Baptism.

Nor is this teaching contrary to the practice of the ancient Church, which obliged Jews, on being baptized, to fast for forty days. This regulation was not imposed by way of satisfaction, but those who were baptized were thus admonished to devote some time uninterruptedly to prayer and fasting in honour of so great a sacrament.

45.—Baptism does not exempt from civil law.

Though it is certain that the punishments due to sin are remitted in Baptism, nevertheless no one is delivered thereby from those penalties that are meted out by civil tribunals to grievous crime; thus, a person condemned to death is not through Baptism rescued from the penalty ordained by the law. At the same time, the religious piety of those princes who, to display the glory of God in the sacraments, should relax and remit the punishment due to the guilty, is deserving of the highest praise.

46.—Penalties inflicted after death.

Furthermore, in reference to the life to come, Baptism effects complete liberation from the punishments due by us on account of original sin—a blessing we are enabled to attain through the merits of the death of our Lord. By Baptism, as has been said, we die with Him; *For*, says the Apostle, *if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, in like manner we shall be of His resurrection.*[3]

47.—We are not freed from the temporal misfortunes consequent on original sin.

Should anyone ask why, immediately after Baptism, we are not at once exempt in this life from suffering and misfortune, and restored by virtue of holy Baptism to that state of dignity and perfection in which Adam, the first parent of the human race, was placed before his sin, the answer will be that it has been so ordained for two principal reasons.

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[1] Acts ii. 38.
[2] Rom. vi. 3.
[3] Rom. vi. 5.

And the first is, that to us who through Baptism are united to the body of Christ and made His members, greater dignity should not be conceded than was given to our Head. Now, if Christ our Lord, though full of grace and truth from the first instant of His incarnation, did not lay aside the frailty of the human nature He assumed until He had endured the torments of His cross and passion, and until He had risen again to the glory of immortality—who can wonder at seeing the faithful who have received the grace of heavenly justification in Baptism, still clothed in a frail and mortal body, until that day when, having already borne much for the sake of Christ, and having passed through the gates of death, they shall have been called once more to life, and at length be found worthy to enjoy unending bliss with Christ ?

The second reason why bodily infirmity, the sense of pain, and the motions of concupiscence remain in us after Baptism is that in them we may, so to say, have the seeds and materials of virtue, from which to derive more abundant fruit of glory and more magnificent rewards. If we patiently endure all the ills of life, and with God's help subject all the evil inclinations of our hearts to the dominion of reason, assuredly may we confidently hope that the day will come when if with the Apostle we shall have *fought the good fight, finished our course, and kept the faith, the Lord the just Judge will render us on that day the crown of justice laid up for us.*[1] Thus it was that our Lord seems to have acted towards the children of Israel—though He had liberated them from the bondage of the Egyptians, and had drowned Pharoah and his host in the sea, yet He did not lead them at once into the promised land, but first subjected them to many dangers and trials ; and finally, when He did put them into possession of the promised land and drove the previous inhabitants out of the land of their fathers, yet other nations whom the Israelites were never able to destroy were allowed to remain, in order that God's people might always have occasion to exercise their warlike courage and fortitude.[2]

We may also add that if at Baptism temporal blessings were also bestowed along with the heavenly gifts adorning the soul, it might well be suspected that many would approach Baptism in hope of acquiring the goods of this life, rather than the glory of the life to come; whereas it is not these false and uncertain goods which are seen, but the true and eternal which are not seen, that should be ever before the eyes of the Christian.

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[1] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. [2] Judges iii. 1.

48.—**Special blessings granted to the regenerate.**

At the same time, however, the condition of this life, full as it is of miseries, is not without its pleasures and joys. For what can be more pleasing and desirable to us, who by Baptism have been engrafted like branches on Christ, than to take up our cross, follow Him as our Leader, and be wearied by no labours, nor hindered by no dangers from eagerly *pressing forward to the prize of the supernal vocation of God*[1]—some to receive from the Lord the crown of virginity, others the crown of teaching and preaching, others the palm of martyrdom, others the gifts appropriate to their virtues; all which glorious titles could be given to none had we not first contended in the race of this calamitous life, and resolutely held our ground on the battle-field.

49.—(*c*) Sanctifying grace.

To return to the effects of Baptism, it should be pointed out that by virtue of this sacrament we are not only delivered from those evils which are truly called greatest of all, but we are also enriched with choicest blessings and gifts—the soul is filled with divine grace whereby we are made just and become sons of God, and heirs to eternal salvation; for it is written: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,*[2] while the Apostle testifies that the Church is *cleansed by the laver of water in the word of life.*[3] Now, according to the decree of the Council of Trent, which must be believed under pain of excommunication, grace is not only that by which sins are remitted, but is also a divine quality inhering in the soul—a certain splendour and light, so to say, effacing all the stains of our souls, and making them more beautiful and glorious. This is plainly inferred from the Sacred Scriptures, when they say that grace is *poured forth* and when they usually refer to it as the *pledge of the Holy Ghost.*

50.—(*d*) **Virtues are also infused in Baptism.**

With grace comes a noble train of all virtues, which are poured along with it into the soul. Hence, St. Augustine explaining the Apostle's words to Titus: *He saved us by the laver of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost, whom He hath*

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[1] Phil. iii. 14.
[2] Mark. xvi. 16.
[3] Eph. v. 26.

poured forth upon us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour,[1] says that the words *poured forth abundantly* mean "for the remission of sins and for abundance of virtues."

51.—(*e*) Incorporation with Christ our Head. By Baptism we are also united and joined as members to Christ our Head; and just as from the head springs the power by which the different parts of the body are enabled to discharge their functions properly, so in like manner from the fullness of Christ our Lord is diffused on all who are justified that divine virtue and grace which renders us capable of discharging all the duties of Christian piety.

52.—Why the practice of piety remains difficult Though thus furnished and adorned with such copious virtues, it should cause no surprise if only with great difficulty and labour can we undertake, or at least perform pious and good actions. This does not mean that the virtues from which such pious actions spring are not bestowed on us by the bounty of God; but it means that even after Baptism there still remains a severe struggle *of the flesh against the spirit,* in which struggle, however, it ill becomes a Christian man to grow disheartened or faint. Relying on the goodness of God we should firmly hope that by the daily exercise of a good life the time will come when *whatsoever things are modest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever holy,*[2] will prove pleasant and easy to us. Let us, then, often meditate on these truths, let us cheerfully practise what they teach, that so *the God of peace may be with us.*[3]

53.—(*f*) The character impressed in Baptism. Furthermore, by Baptism we are sealed with a *character* which can never be effaced from our souls. On this point, however, there is no need to speak at length here, since much that has been said already on the subject of the sacraments in general can be suitably applied to this place.

54.—Baptism not to be repeated. As a consequence of the nature and force of the character, it has been defined by the Church that the sacrament of Baptism should on no account be repeated. Hence the faithful should be frequently and carefully warned by the pastor against falling into error on this head. For we have the Apostle, who says:

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[1] Titus iii. 5, 6. [2] Phil. iv. 8. [3] 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.[1] Again, in his exhortation to the Romans to take care that, being dead in Christ by Baptism, they lose not the life they had received from Him, when he adds, *In that He died to sin He died once,*[2] he clearly seems to signify that as Jesus Christ cannot die again, so likewise neither can we die again by Baptism. Hence, holy Church openly professes that she believes in *one Baptism* only. And that this is highly in keeping with the nature of the sacrament and in accord with right reason, appears from the fact that Baptism is a spiritual regeneration. Just, then, as by the laws of nature we are generated and born but once, and, as St. Augustine says, "There is no returning to the womb," so also is there but one single spiritual regeneration, and Baptism is never at any time to be repeated.

55.—**Conditional Baptism.**

Nor should anyone imagine that the Church repeats it when she baptizes someone concerning whose Baptism there is any uncertainty, using this form: "If thou art baptized I baptize thee not again; but if thou art not yet baptized I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" for by this form of words we affirm that Baptism is not impiously repeated, but holily, yet conditionally, administered.

56. — **Conditional Baptism is to be cautiously administered.**

On this head, however, the pastor should carefully provide against certain abuses which, to the serious injury of the sacrament, are almost of daily occurence. Persons are to be found who imagine they commit no sin when they administer conditional Baptism indiscriminately. Hence, if an infant is brought to them they never think about inquiring whether it has been previously baptized, but straightway give it Baptism; nay, even though fully convinced that the sacrament has been administered at home they nevertheless do not hesitate to repeat the sacred ablution conditionally along with the solemn ceremonies, a thing which cannot be done without committing a sacrilege, and without incurring that stain called by theologians, Irregularity; for, according to the authority of Pope Alexander, conditional Baptism is permitted only in those cases in which, after careful enquiry has been made, there remains some doubt as to whether Baptism has been validly administered. In no other case is it ever lawful to administer Baptism a second time, not even conditionally.

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[1] Eph. iv. 5.

[2] Rom. vi. 10.

57.—(*g*) **Baptism opens the gates of heaven to us.** Now, besides all these advantages which we derive from Baptism, the last of all, and that to which the others are referred, is that it opens to each one of us the gates of heaven that had been heretofore closed by sin. For the rest, the effects wrought in us by virtue of Baptism may be clearly understood from what the Gospel authority assures us took place at the Baptism of our Saviour—the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost appeared descending in the form of a dove on Christ our Lord, signifying thereby that divine gifts are bestowed on those who are baptized, and that the gates of heaven are opened to them; not indeed that the newly baptized enter at once into that glory, but that at a more fitting time, when, freed from all miseries which can have no place in the life of bliss, they shall exchange their mortal life for one of immortality.

Such are the effects of Baptism—effects which, as far as the efficacy of the sacrament is concerned, are certainly common to all; but if we consider the dispositions of those who receive it we must unhesitatingly acknowledge that more (or less) of that heavenly grace is granted to some than to others.

VIII.—THE PRAYERS AND CEREMONIES OF BAPTISM

58.—**The utility of the ceremonies of Baptism.** It now remains to speak clearly and briefly of the prayers, rites, and ceremonies used in the sacrament of Baptism. The Apostle's admonition concerning the gift of tongues, when he says that it is unprofitable to speak unless the faithful understand what is said,[1] may be applied to the rites and ceremonies of Baptism—for they present the visible image and signification of the invisible effects of the sacrament. But if the faithful do not know the force and meaning of those signs, little advantage can be derived from the ceremonies. The pastor, therefore, should endeavour to make the people understand them, and to show them that though these ceremonies are not necessary, yet they are to be considered of no small importance, and should be held in great honour. The authority of those by whom they were instituted (who were unquestionably the holy Apostles), as well as the end for which they willed to have such ceremonies used, easily demonstrates this. By means of them, Baptism is administered with greater devotion and holiness, and the excellent and priceless gifts contained therein are, so to say, set before the eyes, and the sense of God's boundless benefits more deeply impressed on the minds of the faithful.

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[1] 1 Cor. xiv.

59.—Three Classes of ceremonies.

Now, all the ceremonies and prayers which are used by the Church in the administration of Baptism, should be reduced to three heads, so that in explaining them, the pastor may be able to follow a definite order, and his instructions thereon be the more easily retained in the memory of his hearers.

In the first place, then, come those ceremonies that are observed before arriving at the baptismal font; then follow those used at the font; and in the third place those that are added immediately after the sacrament has been administered.

60.—The consecration of baptismal water.

First of all the water to be used in Baptism must be prepared—the baptismal font is consecrated, and the oil of mystic unction is added. Nor may this be done at all times; but, in accordance with ancient custom, certain festivals which are properly deemed specially solemn and holy are selected for the purpose, the water of the sacrament is consecrated on the vigils thereof; and on the same days and on them only (unless in case of necessity) it was the ancient custom of the Church to adminster Baptism. And though in our times the Church, on account of the dangers incidental to the average life, has not thought fit that this custom should be still continued; nevertheless, even down to our own day, she most devoutly observes the solemn feasts of Easter and Pentecost, on which the baptismal water is consecrated.

61.—Why those to be baptized are stationed at the doors of the church.

After the blessing of the water, the other ceremonies that precede Baptism should be explained. Thus, those who are about to be baptized are carried or brought to the door of the church, and are strictly forbidden to enter therein, on the ground that they are unworthy to come into the house of God until they have cast off the yoke of their degrading bondage, and dedicated themselves wholly to Christ our Lord, and to His most just dominion.

62.—And catechised.

Then the priest demands what they ask of the Church, and on being answered by them, or by those who answer for them, he instructs them in the doctrine of the Christian faith, which they are to profess in Baptism. This he does in a brief catechetical instruction—a custom which, no doubt, is derived from the command of our Lord and Saviour addressed to the Apostles: *Go ye into the whole world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*[1] From this command we see that Baptism is not to be administered until at least the chief heads of our religion have been explained.

63.—Catechising of the more ignorant. But as the instruction in question consists of many interrogations, the person who is to be instructed answers for himself, if he is of adult age; but if an infant the sponsor answers for him and makes the solemn promise required.

64.—Exorcisms. Then follows the exorcism, consisting of sacred and religious words and of various prayers to expel the devil and to weaken and destroy his power. To the exorcisms are added other ceremonies, all of which, being mystical, have a special and noteworthy signification.

65.—Salt. Thus, for instance, the salt which is put into the mouth of the person who is brought to be baptized clearly signifies that by the doctrine of faith and the gift of grace he shall be delivered from the corruption of sin, acquire a relish for good works, and be refreshed with the food of divine wisdom.

66.—The sign of the Cross. Along with this, the forehead, the eyes, the breast, the shoulders, and ears are signed with the sign of the Cross, to show that by the mystery of Baptism the senses of the person baptized are opened and strengthened to enable him to receive God and know and observe His commandments.

67.—Saliva. Next, his nostrils and ears are touched with saliva, and he is immediately admitted to the baptismal font, to give us to understand that such is the power of this holy ablution that it gives us light to the mind to perceive heavenly truths, just as sight was restored to the blind man in the Gospel, whom our Lord ordered to wash his eyes, first smeared with clay, in the waters of Siloe.

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[1] Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

68.—Renunciation of Satan.

When all these ceremonies have been completed they come to the baptismal font where the remaining rites and ceremonies are performed. Now in these we may briefly recognize the obligations contained in the Christian religion. Thrice does the priest expressly interrogate the person to be baptized : " Dost thou renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his pomps ? " and to each of these interrogations he replies : "I do renounce them." He, therefore, who is about to join the army of Christ must first holily and religiously promise to renounce the devil and the world, and never for the future cease to detest both one and the other as his most deadly enemies.*

69.—Profession of faith.

Then the priest standing at the baptismal font interrogates him as follows : " Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty ? " and he answers " I do believe " ; and on being similarly interrogated on the other articles of the Creed he solemnly and religiously professes his faith. In these two answers are contained the whole sum and substance of the law of Christ.

70.—The wish to be baptized. Baptism.

And now, when Baptism is about to be administered, the priest asks the person about to be baptized whether it is his wish to be baptized, and on his answering yes, either of himself, or on the sponsor answering for him if he is an infant, the priest at once pours the saving water over him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. For just as man of his own free will obeyed the serpent and was justly condemned, so the Lord will have none but volunteers become His soldiers, so that by a willing obedience to His divine commandments they may attain eternal salvation.

71.—Chrism.

As soon as Baptism has been given the priest anoints with chrism the crown of the head of the person baptized, to show him that from that day forward he is united as a member to Christ the Head, and engrafted on His body, and that he is called a Christian from Christ, just as Christ is named from chrism. The signification of chrism, as St. Ambrose remarks, can be sufficiently understood from the prayers which are then said by the priest.

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* In some editions of the Roman Catechism, the following paragraph is found inserted in this place :—

The anointing with oil of catechumens.

The person to be baptized is next anointed with oil on the breast and between the shoulders—on the breast to show that through the gift of the Holy Ghost, he may reject ignorance and error, and receive the true faith, since *the just man lives by faith* (Gal. iii. 11) ; on the shoulders, that by the grace of the Holy Spirit he may drive away negligence and sloth, and dedicate himself to good works, since *faith without good works is dead* (James ii. 26).

72.—**The white garment.**

The priest next puts a white garment on the baptized, saying: "Receive this white garment, and mayest thou carry it unstained before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, that so thou mayest have eternal life." To infants, however, is given a white cloth, the same words being used. This symbol, the holy Fathers teach, signifies the glory of the resurrection to which we are born again by Baptism, as also the brightness and beauty with which the soul, now purified from the stains of sin, is adorned, and the innocence and integrity which he who has been baptized should preserve throughout the whole course of his life.

73.—**The lighted taper.**

A lighted taper is next put into the hand to show that faith inflamed by charity which is received in Baptism is to be fed and increased by the practice of good works.

74.—**The name given in Baptism.**

Lastly, a name is given to the baptized. It should be taken from some one who is numbered amongst the saints for his eminent piety and virtues. The likeness of name will help to excite each one to imitate the virtues and holiness of the saint who bore that name and to pray and hope that he whom he strives to imitate will be his advocate and watch over the safety both of his soul and body.

Hence those are to be reproved who purposely select and bestow on their children heathen names, or names of those particularly who were conspicuously wicked. From this circumstance may readily be understood the value such persons set on the practice of Christian piety, when they seem to be so enamoured of the memory of impious men as to be ready to have the ears of the faithful ring with such profane names.

75.—**Recapitulation.**

When all this has been explained by the pastor, nothing would seem to be omitted that can be regarded as necessary for a knowledge of this sacrament. It has been shown what the name of Baptism signifies, what is its nature, what its substance, and what its parts. It has been pointed out by whom it was instituted, who are its necessary ministers, and who are to be chosen as guardians to help the weakness of the person baptized. It has also been explained to whom Baptism should be administered, and what should be their dispositions ; what the virtue and efficacy of the sacrament ; and finally, as far as necessary, the rites and ceremonies to be used. The pastor should remember that all these things are to be taught to this end, that the constant care and thought of the faithful should ever be directed to the faithful observance of the promises they holily and religiously made at Baptism, and thus lead a life in keeping with the profession of Christianity.

Fifth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

Having already seen the conditions necessary for the validity of the sacrament of Baptism; having also discussed the obligations imposed on us by its reception, we now proceed to consider another very important point, and that is, the effects produced in us by Baptism,—a consideration highly calculated to make us sensible of the greatness of the benefit received.

The unhappy condition not only of the adults, but also of the infants, who present themselves for Baptism, may be inferred from the various ceremonies employed by the Church before administering it—ceremonies you must have witnessed several times, but which, as a rule, are looked at through mere curiosity and often with a feeling of contempt,—seldom with the eyes of faith. Why is the person to be baptized stopped at the door of the Church, or at least kept outside the baptismal font, before being admitted? What is the meaning of all those exorcisms and exhortations and instructions gone through by the priest, and the command given to the devil to depart out of that poor creature? What means the breathing thrice repeated over his face, like to that divine breath with which God, after having formed the body of Adam, infused therein the vivifying spirit—*He breathed into his face the breath of life?* And that rubbing of his ears and nostrils with saliva, resembling what Jesus Christ did on the occasion when a man who was possessed, as well as deaf and dumb, was presented to Him? And, finally, the repeated making of the sign of the Cross on the forehead—of that Cross which destroyed the empire of the devil?

All these actions, and others also that are omitted for sake of brevity, denote clearly enough the miserable condition of the infant to be baptized—they denote that he is not worthy to be admitted into the number of the faithful, since, being excluded from heaven, he should also be excluded from the Church, which is the figure of, and the introduction to, heaven; they denote also that he is corrupted and foul with guilt, subject to the power and slavery of the devil, and hence in a condition of deafness, dumbness, blindness, and spiritual death, from which he can only be liberated by the grace of Jesus Christ applied to his soul in the sacrament of Baptism. In a word, all the ceremonies used by the Church are a confession—an authentic proof—of that sin which is transmitted from Adam to his descendants, and of the fatal results arising therefrom.

Yet, hardly is that infant touched by the saving waters of Baptism, hardly have the sanctifying words : "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," been pronounced over him when a swift change takes place in him. He acquires a new being—no longer an earthly and guilty one, such as is acquired by his birth from Adam—but heavenly and divine, such as is the life of Jesus Christ. Such, then, in a few words, is the efficacy of Baptism ; but in order to understand it still more clearly it will be useful to discuss its effects in detail.

The first effect of Baptism is the *remission of sins*—not only original sin but also all the actual sins that may have been committed by the person who is being baptized. Baptism blots out all the sins that are found in the soul—blots them out so completely that there does not remain the slightest stain—and restores him to the self-same degree of innocence and purity as was possessed by Adam when he sprung fresh from the hands of the Creator.

This, God had foretold by the mouth of the prophet Ezechiel : *I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness.*[1] Hence the Apostle St. Paul, after having recounted to the people of Corinth a long list of their sins, added : *And such some of you were ; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*[2]

The second effect of Baptism is the *remission of all the punishment*, whether temporal or eternal, *due to sin.* In virtue of Baptism, the person baptized is no longer a debtor in any way to divine justice neither in this life nor the life to come ; so much is this the case that were he to die immediately after Baptism he would go straight to heaven without the slightest hindrance, because by Baptism the merits of Jesus Christ are applied to our souls without reserve or limitation : *There is now no condemnation to them, who are buried together with Him by Baptism unto death.*[3]

Hence it is that it has never been the practice of the Church to impose on adults who are being baptized any works of satisfaction such as are imposed on the faithful who approach the sacrament of Penance. This is, in fact, one of the principal differences between Baptism and Penance. Both sacraments do indeed remit sins, but Baptism remits them gratuitously, leaving no satisfaction to be paid; while Penance as a rule changes eternal punishment into a temporal punishment to be undergone either in this life or in the life to come; and this in accordance with the justice of God which demands that those who have been faithless to God, and who through their own fault have lost the grace received in Baptism, should be treated with greater severity.

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[1] Ezech. xxxvi. 25. [2] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [3] Rom. viii. 1 ; vi 4.

At the same time we must not allow ourselves to imagine that an adult on being baptized is completely dispensed from all penance, for such a belief would be plainly opposed to the maxims of the Gospel which says to all without distinction: *Unless you shall do penance you shall all likewise perish.*[1] If we speak of an expiatory penance—a penance imposed for sins committed before Baptism and by Baptism blotted out, from such penances the person baptized is completely absolved; but he cannot be dispensed from that penance which is called preservative, because it helps to avoid sins that may be committed in the future. No one has ever yet succeeded, and no one ever shall succeed in maintaining the beauty and brightness of his innocence for any length of time without the use and practice of Christian mortification. Hence, even the saints who were the most remarkable for innocence of life did not consider themselves exempt from practising penance. And besides, where would be the necessary conformity with Jesus Christ crucified, by whom, as St. Paul says, we are clothed in Baptism: *As many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ.*[2] The obligation and necessity of penance, therefore, always remain for other reasons besides those of satisfaction.

And all the more so since faith teaches that while sin and the punishment due to sin are blotted out in Baptism, yet that the consequences of original sin are not completely removed—amongst which we are to reckon not only corporal infirmities and miseries, and the necessity of dying, but also ignorance, concupiscence, inclination to evil, rebellion of our passions—unhappy relics that still survive within us, and compel us to hold ourselves ever ready with arms in our hands to watch and combat. God, whose counsels are full of justice and wisdom, has willed that these effects should remain in us as a salutary reminder of our original fall and wretchedness, as an exercise of humility, as a test and trial of our fidelity, and as an occasion of our greater merit. But to comfort us He makes it plain to us that those effects cannot stain us with sin against our own wish; that they can be overcome by the help of those aids to which the grace of Baptism gives us a special right; and that finally we shall one day be completely freed from them by the grace of this sacrament which throws open the kingdom of heaven to us.

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[1] Luke xiii. 3.

[2] Gal. iii. 27.

For this is a third effect of the sacrament—an effect which implies several others, such as sanctifying grace, the grace of purity, justice, and innocence, which renders us lovable in the sight of God, and which is symbolized by the white robe the Church puts on the newly-baptized; the grace of sweetness and strength represented by the unction which the Church makes with the oil on the breast and shoulders of catechumens; and finally, the grace which makes us *partakers of the divine nature*,[1] and unites us in a special alliance with the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity in whose name we have been baptized.

Hence we become not only friends of God, dear to Him and ardently loved by Him, but real sons of God—not indeed sons by nature, as was Jesus Christ, but sons by adoption: *Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God.*[2]

In virtue of this divine sonship of adoption, we also become brothers of Jesus Christ, who does not disdain to raise us up and admit us to the honour of His divine brotherhood: *He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*[3]

Also we become the living temples of the Holy Ghost, who takes up His dwelling within us, adorns and sanctifies our souls with the divine habits of faith, hope, and charity, and with the infusion of the other supernatural gifts, and even regenerates our very bodies, in which He plants the vivifying seed of a happy resurrection.

Finally, and in consequence of all this, we acquire a true and special right to enter one day into possession of the kingdom of God: *And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.*[4] What priceless effects and blessings! But that is not all.

The fourth and last effect of Baptism is to imprint on us a holy and indelible seal—a spiritual seal, it is true, but still a real seal, which, like a brilliant star, is set in the soul of the person who has been baptized, and which we call the *character* of Baptism.

This character, which is represented by the sacred chrism impressed on the forehead, consecrates us specially to God, enrols us amongst the ranks of the faithful, and distinguishes us from unbelievers in the same way as the consecration of a church distinguishes and separates that place from all profane edifices. Furthermore, it gives us the right to the other sacraments, and makes us partakers of all the blessings and advantages enjoyed by the members of the true Church.

Such, then, are the choice effects wrought in us by Baptism, which is on that account well called the sacrament of *Regeneration*, of *Illumination*, of *New Life*. We were, says St. Paul, unfortunate children of our first parents, the heirs of their sin, slaves of the devil, enemies of God, eternally banished from the happy land of Paradise: *We were by nature children of wrath*[1]*;* but from the moment when we were immersed in the new pool of Bethsaida that is so far better than the old one, all guilt and stain were laid aside, we received a new, supernatural and divine life, and we were raised to the great dignity of sons of God and hereditary princes of Paradise. Oh, inestimable grace and power of the sacrament, which is nevertheless so little valued by many Christians who would almost seem to consider it no great loss had they been always deprived of it!

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[1] 2 Peter i. 4. [2] 1 John iii. 1. [3] Heb. ii. 11. [4] Rom. viii. 17.

To have some idea of the greatness of the benefit conferred by Baptism, it will be well to try and see with the eye of faith the great difference that exists between a person who is baptized and one who is not. We have little difficulty in measuring the distance between other objects of less importance. For example, if you should happen to see a man who has been blind from his birth, who is a cripple and deformed, who is an imbecile and simple, miserable and utterly wretched, you at once say in your heart, "Woe to me if God had made me be born in such a condition as that"; and you at once understand the special mercy and the loving distinction used by God towards you, in having you born in a different condition, sound and well-formed in person, and sufficiently provided with the world's goods, or at least with the industry and capacity to provide them. Yet all the corporal miseries and infirmities that can arise are not a hindrance to eternal salvation, and may even be a means to attain it more easily.

Why, then, do we value so lightly the great gift given us by God in holy Baptism, in drawing us, in preference to others, out of a state, not merely of temporal tribulation and misery, but of eternal damnation? Without Baptism, there could be no salvation for us—this is the first grace of the way to salvation, this is the beginning and the foundation of all the other graces, this, then, is the greatest gift, and a gift all the more signal and precious because it has not been merited by us, and could not be merited by us. It was simply an effect of His gratuitous mercy that God made us be born in a Christian country, and led us to the grace of Baptism: *Not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, by the laver of regeneration.*[2]

The consequence is plain and manifest—bear always the very highest esteem for the grace of Baptism. Let all who have the happiness still to possess it guard it diligently—as it is the greatest treasure of the soul, so is the loss of it the greatest misfortune that can happen. And though when lost it may be acquired again by the sacrament of Penance, yet it is not acquired with the same facility, or certainty.

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[1] Eph. ii. 3.

[2] Titus iii. 5.

As for you, O parents, if you have any faith at all, there is nothing about which you should be more careful than in the protection and preservation of the innocence of your children. You should receive them with greater joy when they are carried from the sacred font to the house, than when they first see the light—the first birth is a carnal birth, which they have in common with all, even brute creatures ; while the second, which is acquired in Baptism, is a spiritual and divine birth. Remember also that God and the Church entrust these dear pledges to you, that you may be their custodians and guardian angels. You are responsible for them and you must give a strict account of them.

Finally, each and every one of us should bear in mind, and ponder over, the words which, after Baptism, the priest addressed to us as he put over us the white cloth, signifying the grace conferred on us : " Receive this white garment, and mayest thou bear it stainless before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ, that so thou mayest have life eternal." Not less significant are the words which immediately follow, as he puts a lighted taper into the hands : " Receive this lighted lamp ; preserve inviolable thy Baptism ; keep God's commandments, so that when the Lord shall come to the nuptials thou mayest be able to meet Him along with all the saints in the heavenly court, and thus possess eternal life, and live for endless ages." Those are words we never should forget—they should be ever deeply graven on the heart, for they shall one day form the subject-matter of a strict investigation before the judgment-seat of God ; and God grant that they do not contribute to our eternal reprobation and damnation !

Sixth Instruction on the Sacraments

BAPTISM: OBLIGATION TO DEDICATE ONESELF TO GOD FROM ONE'S TENDEREST YEARS

THE value of baptismal grace and the serious obligations it involves should serve as a strong encouragement to each one to remain faithful to God. And yet, how common is vice and depravity! At the dawn of reason, the impulses of age are soon marked by no light traces of vice and disorder, and to the greater number can be applied St. Augustine's tearful confession regarding his own case: "How few my years and how many my sins!"

I cannot, then, consider the subject of the obligations arising from Baptism complete without directing a few words of exhortation to you, dear children, and young people, who listen to me, and pointing out the importance of dedicating yourselves to God, from your tenderest years—and that for two reasons assigned by St. Thomas, reasons that will now serve me as a guide, and they are: Our greater merit in the sight of God, and our own greater advantage. Observe that while this is not an instruction in the ordinary sense of the word, it will, however, be found to be a highly profitable appendix to what has been explained on former occasions—useful not only to you, but indirectly to the others present also.

In the first place I have observed that the service rendered by you to God possesses greater merit in His sight. "Service rendered to God in youth is the more pleasing to Him." I do not of course mean to assert that we cannot meritoriously devote ourselves to God in every age. Such and so great is His goodness that He does not refuse our service whenever we return to Him from the error of our ways, nor does He even despise the approaches of declining and decrepit old age. This He aimed at teaching us in the well-known parable of the labourers called by the master of the vineyard to cultivate it at different hours of the day, down even to the fall of the evening—a parable confirmed by the works and example of many who gave themselves to God in mature age and became shining lights of holiness. All that is true—most true. Yet, no one can deny that service rendered to God from our earliest years is particularly pleasing to Him.

In the first place, because to God we thereby offer first fruits which by their very nature are precious to Him—I mean the most beautiful, most innocent, and purest years of our lives. Who is there who does not appreciate and enjoy in a special way the favour and love of a person who deprives himself of the first and choicest fruits of his garden in order to present him with a gift and an offering? Even God Himself has ever shown Himself most desirous of such first fruits—in the Old Law He ordained that of the fruits of the earth, the first-born of animals: and of men, the eldest child of the family, should be offered to Him. All this was not without a mysterious purpose, but was intended to denote that our first years are specially dear to the Lord, and these He specially demands of us.

Moreover, in offering Him the first fruits of your years you make Him a most acceptable sacrifice, because you offer Him an age not only the most beautiful of all, but also an age that is tempted and allured beyond every other age. Let me explain. To give one's self to God after having long served the world, and after having by bitter personal experience discovered its vanities, its betrayals, its faithlessness, is certainly not a great gift; but you dedicate yourself to God at a time when you do not thus know the world, and when the world consequently presents itself to you smiling and entrancing, and pictures itself to your mind in images of pleasure and happiness. Now who is there who does not see the great difference in merit between both cases,—between renouncing a world known by experience to be lying, deceitful, tyrannous, and renouncing a world that still bears only the character of unmixed pleasure, pure fascination, and unlimited promise of contentment and delight?

Hence arises another circumstance that renders such a gift still more acceptable to the Lord, and it is that it redounds to His greater glory because accompanied by greater edification towards others. Is it not true that there is no sight so tender and so moving in the eyes of all as to see a youth or maiden who do not allow themselves to be carried away by the current of bad example, and who, in the midst of the impetuosity of youth, the attractions of the world, the impulses and allurements of every kind, know how to remain faithful to God, modest, chaste, prudent, and devout? Even worldly persons regard such as these with affectionate veneration and esteem—a veneration and esteem that are always a living and salutary reproof to themselves, and that can avail and sometimes do avail as an impulse and encouragement to imitate their example. Thus, St. Augustine confesses that the remembrance and the sight of so many innocent young men and maidens was what stung him to the quick, and finally determined him to quit the filth of his passions: "Canst not thou do what they were able to do?"

From all these rapid reflections you will clearly see that the worship you pay to God in your tender years, as well as being precious in itself, cannot but be highly pleasing to God. But along with this, it will also be to your greater advantage—and this is the next point we have to reflect on.

First of all, it is so on account of the peculiar happiness that arises from the practice of the exercises of piety and devotion. You do not know now, and you cannot even imagine how difficult it is, to turn to God after having wasted your best years in the corruptions of vice, and in satisfaction of the passions. How many efforts must not be made to conquer evil habits, and shake off the masterful hold of an evil life, before becoming accustomed to piety that was neither known nor practised heretofore, and before renewing oneself and changing oneself in everything? Persons such as this feel by bitter experience the truth of the divine oracle that vice grows incarnate in the very bones: *His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth*;[1] as also of that other saying that it is as difficult to change life and habits as it is for the Ethiopian to change the native bronze of his skin: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?*[2] Added to these intrinsic difficulties are other circumstances rendering the return of the heart to God always more slow, involved and difficult—the ties of daily duty, the distractions of business, family cares, and the hundred bonds of human respect. Oh, how hard is the condition of a man who, now a hoary sinner bowed down under the weight of vicious habits, tries to recover the good path! Suffice it to say that in order to succeed, St. Augustine had to sustain four years of combat and of fierce internal struggle, as he himself tells us in his *Confessions.*

But these difficulties are not for you who apply yourselves early to piety. Just as a tree while still young is easily bent in any shape, or just as soft wax easily receives that form that is to be impressed on it; so piety quickly takes root in a soul that is still virgin and is not yet ruined and depraved by evil maxims or evil habits. I know that owing to original sin our nature is inclined to evil from our youth; but we must remember that still greater harm is done from a vicious life. In spite of the original fall and wretchedness there always remain in us certain seeds of inclination to good, to virtue, to rectitude, to honesty, which if not soon suffocated by vice, if cultivated diligently, never fail to blossom ere long into beautiful flowers and fruit. In confirmation and proof of this, I appeal to the example of many youths who correspond faithfully to the loving care of their parents.

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[1] Job xx. 11.

[2] Jer. xiii. 23.

And just as piety blossoms more easily in such hearts as these, so it is also easily maintained and preserved. For this, too, we have the clear testimony of Holy Writ : *A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it.*[1] The path a man pursues from his youth he will continue to follow in old age, for the virtues or the vices of earlier years are transmitted to the years that follow, and that which in the beginning was a matter of choice becomes little by little a second nature. True, the statement is not always nor invariably verified, yet it is verified in most cases, for experience shows that as it is rare to find persons improve who have been disorderly and dissolute in youth, so it is rare to find persons fall away who have lived a good life from their youth.

A young man who from his earliest years has laid a good foundation of morals and religion *shall not be moved*[2] says the Holy Ghost in Ecclesiasticus. With increasing years increase also his judgment and good sense, regularity of life, the proper distribution of his time, the fervour of his devotion, his taste for the things of God, and the conviction of a well-regulated conscience that shows him how to avoid the attractions and corruptions of the world and all evil inclinations thereto. You will see him attend now to his duties and occupations, now to his accustomed works of piety and religion, with greater pleasure than to the empty sights and attractions of the world which are always regarded by him with indifference and contempt.

And what is to be said of the special assistance, protection, and guidance to be expected by such as these from God ? If the worship paid Him in youth is an object of so much pleasure in His eyes, what doubt can there be that more abundant graces and blessings should not also be had from Him in consequence ? Circumstances then may change, years may change, occupations may change; but throughout all the varying occupations and times and changes, the good habits rooted from the first shall never change, but the grace of the Lord shall ever accompany you enabling you to advance with steady strides in years and piety, without ever turning one step aside from the right path—*he shall not be moved.*

Behold, then, the many solid reasons both on God's part and on your own why you should resolve to consecrate yourselves to Him from a tender age. They are all summed up by the Holy Ghost in this one sentence : *It is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke*

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[1] Prov. xxii. 6.

[2] Ecclus. xv. 3.

from his youth.[1] Oh, it is a thing good under every respect to accustom yourself to the yoke of the Lord, and to a virtuous life, even from your youth!

I must not omit to observe here that nothing is more dangerous than to calculate on old age and on the years to come, which *the Father hath put in His power.*[2] This fallacious calculation deceives very many. They feel themselves in health, in vigour, and in robust strength, and they therefore make up their minds to enjoy themselves, calculating on being able to reserve their old age and their declining years to God. But who can assure them they will reach those years they have marked out for themselves? Should not they be terrified by the frequent examples of persons cut off by death in tender age, in the prime of life, and sometimes by a death hastened by the vices to which they unfortunately have abandoned themselves? Do not, then, rely on such unfounded and deceitful hopes as these.

Even so, granted that the Lord will be pleased to lengthen your years to the ripest old age, if you are persuaded, as you ought to be by faith, that your end is not here below, that your one great and only important business in this world is to save your souls, and that the world passes rapidly, will the choice merits you can acquire before God, and the greater facility you will have in entering on and maintaining a virtuous life, have no effect on your heart? Nay, I have not yet referred to the greatest advantage arising from this course, which is the moral certainty of dying a good and holy death. "He who serves God from his youth," says St. Thomas, "departs this life sure of his salvation."

Oh, who can conceive, and who can express the Christian's tranquillity, joy, and hope in that bitter and awful moment of death when, looking back over his years, he is conscious he has tried from his youth to serve God, and that, with the exception perhaps of some passing errors that were soon repented, he has been faithful and true to his Master! In that dreadful moment such a thought is so consoling that it is cheaply purchased at the cost of every sacrifice and every suffering during the brief course of our life.

Nay, even in the present order of things, his condition is happier, for St. Paul has declared that piety is useful for all things and carries with it every good hope both for this life and for the life to come: *Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*[3] Peace of soul, the quiet progress of our affairs, public esteem, a good name which is the foundation of prosperity and of a successful career, and above all the blessing of the Lord—these are the choice fruits of a well-spent and virtuous youth; just as on the contrary, disorder, extravagance, loss of property and of health, a bad name, discord, strife, perpetual trouble, are the usual consequences of an unregulated and vicious youth. Can this be doubted with so many daily examples before our eyes?

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[1] Lament. iii. 27. [2] Acts i. 7. [3] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

I shall conclude with that remarkable advice of the Holy Ghost, which is specially directed to you: *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come.*[1] Remember your Creator in the time of your youth if you wish to save yourself from the days, that are sure to come, of trial, affliction, regret, and not seldom useless regret. Do not be led away by the bad example of your companions, the allurements of this world, the attractions of the day, much less by the fatal suggestions of the demon to yield for a time to evil inclinations and then repent and follow the right path once more; for you will find yourself carried further than you had counted on, and you will learn one day that it is not so easy to turn back from the course you have followed.

Bearing these motives in mind, aim steadily from henceforth at the service and worship of God, who is the Sovereign Lord of all men, all times, all ages, and enter on the practice of piety now, while nature is pliable and vice has not scattered its baneful seeds within you, or if sown they have not yet taken root. This is the way—the only way—to render yourselves pleasing both to God and man, the delight of heaven and earth, happy in this life as far as one can be happy, and happy for ever after throughout the endless ages of eternity.

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[1] Eccles. xii. 1.

CHAPTER IV

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The Roman Catechism (Part II)

1.—Its explanations highly necessary at the present day.

If ever the pastor's diligence was called for in the explanation of the sacrament of Confirmation, assuredly is it specially necessary at the present day when this sacrament is completely omitted by many even in God's holy Church, and when few are found who endeavour to obtain therefrom the fruit of divine grace which they should derive from it. Accordingly, lest this divine blessing may, through their own fault and to their very serious injury, be bestowed on them in vain, the faithful should be instructed on the nature, dignity, and virtue of this sacrament, both on Whit Sunday on which day it is specially administered, and also on such other days as the pastor shall judge suitable, in order that they may understand not only that it is not to be omitted, but also that it is to be received with the greatest fervour and devotion.

I.—CONFIRMATION A TRUE SACRAMENT

2.—Why called Confirmation.

Beginning with the name, it should be shown that this sacrament is called Confirmation by the Church for this reason, that a baptized person on being anointed with sacred chrism by the bishop, who at the same time uses solemn words : " I sign thee with the sign of the Cross, and confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," will, if nothing else intervenes to impede the efficacy of the sacrament, become stronger with the strength of the new grace he receives, and begins to be a perfect soldier of Christ.

3.—Confirmation is a true sacrament. The teaching of the Popes.

In Confirmation the Catholic Church has always recognized and confessed that there is found the true and real nature of a sacrament. Pope Melchiades and several other holy and ancient Pontiffs unmistakably proclaimed this— amongst others St. Clement, who could not have declared the truth o: this doctrine in weightier words than he uses when he says: "Each one should hasten, without any delay, to be born again of God and then to be signed by the bishop, that is to say, receive the seven-fold grace of the Holy Ghost. He cannot for a moment be considered a perfect Christian who wilfully, and negligently and without any necessity omits to receive this sacrament. Thus it has been handed down to us by St. Peter; thus the other Apostles, inspired by God, have taught." This same faith, too, the Popes Urban, Fabian and Eusebius who animated with the same spirit, shed their blood for the name of Christ, confirmed by their teaching as may be seen from their decrees.

4.—The teaching of the Fathers.

To this should be added the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, amongst whom Denis the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens, when explaining how this holy ointment should be made and used, says: "The priests clothe the person baptized with a garment in conformity with his state of innocence (and grace) before leading him into the presence of the bishop, who signs him with holy and truly divine unction and makes him partaker of the most holy communion." Also Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, attributes such importance to this sacrament that he did not hesitate to say that Novatus the heretic could not have received the Holy Ghost because he had been baptized during a severe illness, and consequently had not been signed with the seal of chrism. On this head, however, we have the unmistakable testimony of St. Ambrose in his book on the *Initiated,* and of St. Augustine in his book written against the Epistles of the Donatist Petilian. Both of these saints were so convinced of the absolute truth of this sacrament that they even expounded and proved it by scriptural passages. One of them states that to the sacrament of Confirmation apply the words of the Apostle: *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption*;[1] the other that passage in the Psalms: *Like the precious ointment on the head, that ran*

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[1] Eph. iv. 30.

down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron ;[1] and also that other passage of the Apostle : *The Charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.*[2]

5.—Difference between Baptism and Confirmation.

Though Baptism was said by Melchiades to be very closely connected with Confirmation, yet it must not be regarded as the same sacrament, but altogether another and a different sacrament. It is an established fact that the difference in grace given by each sacrament, and the difference between the signs used to signify that grace, clearly prove that they are distinct and different sacraments.

Just, then, as by the sacrament of Baptism men are begotten to a new life ; so by the sacrament of Confirmation those who are already begotten grow to be perfect men *having put away the things of a child.*[3] Hence it is clear that there is just as much difference between Baptism which regenerates and Confirmation by which the faithful grow and attain perfect spiritual strength, as there is between birth and growth in the natural life.

Besides, as there must be a new and distinct sacrament for each new class of difficulty the soul has to face, it will be seen that just as we need the grace of Baptism to infuse faith into the soul, so also do we know that it is highly advantageous that the souls of the faithful be strengthened by another kind of grace, in order to be deterred by nothing—neither fear of pains, tortures, nor death—from the confession of the true faith. Now, since this effect is produced by the sacred chrism of Confirmation, it is clearly inferred therefrom that the nature of this sacrament is different from that of Baptism. Hence Pope Melchiades expresses the difference between them accurately, when he writes : " In Baptism man becomes enlisted in the army ; in Confirmation he is armed for battle. In the font of Baptism the Holy Ghost imparts fullness to accomplish innocence ; in Confirmation He furnishes perfection to grace. In Baptism we are regenerated unto life ; after Baptism we are strengthened for the combat. Regeneration of itself saves during times of peace those who receive Baptism ; but Confirmation arms and prepares for war." This teaching has not only been given by the other Councils, but has been specially defined by the Council of Trent, so much so that we are now no longer at liberty not only to hold any other opinion, but not even to entertain the least doubt on the point.

[1] Ps. cxxxii. 2. [2] Rom. v. 5. [3] I Cor. xiii. 11.

6.—The Author of Confirmation.

But since, as already pointed out, it is highly necessary to explain from whom the sacraments in general have had their origin, so also should the same point be set forth regarding Confirmation in order that the faithful may be more and more impressed with the sanctity of this sacrament.

Accordingly the pastor should show that Christ our Lord was not only the Author of Confirmation, but as Pope St. Fabian witnesses, He also it was who prescribed the rite of chrism and the words used by the Catholic Church in its administration. To those who acknowledge Confirmation to be a sacrament this can easily be made clear from the fact that all the sacred mysteries are above the powers of human nature and can be instituted by none but by God Himself.

II.—MATTER AND FORM OF CONFIRMATION

7.—The matter of this sacrament is chrism.

We now come to speak of the parts of Confirmation, and first of all of its matter which is called chrism—a Greek word used by profane writers to denote any sort of ointment, but commonly restricted by sacred writers to signify that ointment only which is made of oil and balsam solemnly consecrated by the bishop. Hence a mixture of two material things supplies the matter of Confirmation—which mixture of different things signifies the manifold grace of the Holy Ghost conferred on those who are confirmed. It also shows forth the excellence of the sacrament.

That such is truly the matter of the sacrament, holy Church and her Councils have always taught. This teaching has been handed down by St. Denis and several others of the most authoritative Fathers, especially by Pope Fabian who testifies that the Apostles received the composition of chrism from the Lord and handed it down to us.

8.—Why oil was chosen.

And indeed to declare the effect of this sacrament no other matter could be more appropriate than chrism. Oil, which by its nature is rich, unctuous, and fluid, expresses the plenitude of grace which, through the Holy Ghost, flows down on us from Christ our Head, and is poured over us, *like the ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard of Aaron, to the skirt of his* *garments*[1]; for *God anointed Him with the oil of gladness above all His fellows,*[2] and *of His fullness we all have received.*[3]

9.—And why balsam.

As for the balsam, the odour of which is agreeable in the highest degree, what else does it signify but that the faithful when made perfect by the sacrament of Confirmation spread around them the sweetness of all virtues, so that they are able to say with the Apostle: *We are unto God the good odour of Christ.*[4] Balsam has, moreover, the property of warding off corruption from whatever is anointed with it—a property admirably suited to denote the virtue of this sacrament. For it is abundantly evident that the souls of the faithful when prepared by that heavenly grace which is imparted in Confirmation are easily protected against the contagion of sin.

10.—Chrism to be consecrated by bishops alone.

Chrism is consecrated by the bishop with solemn ceremonies. Fabian, a Pope renowned for his saintly life and glorious martyrdom, tells us that our Saviour thus ordained at the Last Supper when He committed it to His Apostles. Why it should be so, may be shown from reason itself. In most of the other sacraments Christ selected a matter which He Himself had sanctified. Thus not alone did He will to appoint water to be the matter of Baptism when He said: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,*[5] but He also, at His own Baptism, gave to water the power of sanctifying for the future. Hence St. Chrysostom notes: "The water of Baptism could not wash away the sins of believers if it had not been sanctified by contact with our Lord's body." Now since our Lord did not consecrate this matter of Confirmation by His own use or touch, it necessarily follows that it must be consecrated by holy and sacred prayers—a consecration that can appertain to none but a bishop who has been appointed the ordinary minister of this sacrament.

11.—The form of this sacrament.

The other constituent part of Confirmation—the form and the words to be used at the anointing—should also be explained, and the faithful be admonished that at the reception of this sacrament when they hear these words pronounced they should particularly excite their minds to sentiments of piety, faith, and religion, so as to permit no obstacle to stand in the way of heavenly grace.

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[1] Ps. cxxxii. 2. [2] Ps. xliv. 8. [3] John i. 16. [4] 2 Cor. ii. 15. [5] John iii. 5.

The form, then, is composed of the words: "I sign thee with the sign of the Cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Here again an appeal to reason easily confirms this truth. For the form of the sacrament must comprise all that goes to explain the nature and substance of the sacrament itself.

12.—It is a perfect form.

Now in Confirmation there are chiefly three things to be observed—the divine power operating as principal cause in the sacrament, the strength of mind and soul imparted by the sacred unction to the faithful towards their salvation, and the seal impressed on him who is about to take part in the combat waged by the army of Christ.

Now the first of these three is clearly indicated by the words which come last in the form: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" the second, by the words in the middle of the form: "I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation;" and the third by the words in the beginning of the form: "I sign thee with the sign of the Cross." In any event, even if it could not be proved by reason that this is the true and perfect form, the authority of the Catholic Church, under whose guidance we have been taught, leaves not the smallest room for doubt on the point.

III.—THE MINISTER OF CONFIRMATION

13.—The minister of Confirmation.

The pastor should also show to whom it is that the administration of this sacrament has been specially committed. *There are*, according to the Prophet, *many who run without being sent*.[1] It is therefore necessary to explain who are the true and legitimate ministers of Confirmation, in order that the faithful may be enabled to receive its grace and effects.

Now Holy Writ shows that the bishop alone is the ordinary minister of this sacrament. Thus in the Acts of the Apostles we read that when Samaria had received the word of God, Peter and John were sent to them, and *prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for He was not as yet come upon any of them, but they were only baptized.*[1] In this passage we may see that he who had baptized them, being only a deacon, had no power of confirming them; but that this office was reserved to a more perfect order of ministers, that is, the Apostles. The same point may be noticed whenever Holy Scripture mentions this sacrament.[2]

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[1] Jer. xxiii. 21.

14.—The witness of the Fathers.

In further proof, we have also the clearest testimony of the holy Fathers and of Popes Urban, Eusebius, Damasus, Innocent, and Leo, as may be seen from their decrees; while St. Augustine complains seriously of the corrupt practice of the people of Egypt and Alexandria whose priests presumed to administer the sacrament of Confirmation.

And that it is right and reasonable that this office has been limited to bishops, the pastor will be able to show by an example. In the building of a house it is the artisans (who are the inferior agents) who prepare and arrange mortar, lime, wood, and so on; yet it is to the architect that the completion of the work belongs. In the same way this sacrament, by which the spiritual edifice is, so to say, completed, should be administered by none other than by the bishop.

15.—Sponsors.

There must also be a sponsor, just as in Baptism. If those who prepare for the gladiatorial combats need some one to show them, by his skill and advice, the strokes and feints by which to overcome the enemy while remaining safe themselves; much more will the faithful need a leader and adviser when, covered, as it were, and armed with the strong armour of this sacrament, they engage in the spiritual combat, the reward whereof is life eternal. Rightly, then, are sponsors to be admitted to the administration of Confirmation also; and they contract a spiritual affinity which prevents lawful marriage between the parties, just as has been already explained in the case of sponsors admitted in Baptism.

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[1] Acts viii. 15, 16.

[2] Acts xix. 6.

IV.—NECESSITY OF CONFIRMATION

16.—The subject of Confirmation.

It frequently happens that in receiving this sacrament the faithful are either too hurried, or grossly negligent, or procrastinating (not even to mention those who are grown so impious as to utterly despise it). Hence the pastor will also indicate the persons, their age, and their dispositions, to whom Confirmation ought to be administered.

And first he must show that Confirmation is not so absolutely necessary that no one can be saved without it. Yet though not thus necessary, it ought to be omitted by none—very great care should be taken to avoid any sort of negligence in connexion with a matter which is so full of holiness and through which the gifts of God are so liberally bestowed. Whatever God has proposed for the sanctification of all should also be eagerly desired by all.

17.—All should be confirmed.

And, in fact, St. Luke, describing this wonderful effusion of the Holy Spirit, says: *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting,*[1] and (a little further on) he adds, *they were filled with the Holy Ghost.*

Now, as that house was a type and figure of holy Church it will be gathered from these words that the sacrament of Confirmation which dates from that day pertains to all the faithful.

The same conclusion may easily be drawn from the nature of the sacrament itself. All those who stand in need of spiritual increase, and who should tend to the perfection of the Christian religion, ought to be confirmed with the sacred chrism. Now there is no one to whom this does not closely apply. Just as nature intends that all those who are born into the world should grow up and reach maturity, even though at times her design is not accomplished; so the Catholic Church, our common mother, earnestly desires that the form of a Christian man should be perfected in all those whom she has regenerated by Baptism. Now, as this is accomplished by means of the sacrament of mystic Unction, it is clear that this sacrament should be received by all.

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[1] Acts ii. 2.

18.—Age at which to receive Confirmation.

It should be observed, however, that while the sacrament of Confirmation may be administered to all who have been baptized, yet it is not expedient to administer it to children who have not yet attained the use of reason. Hence if it does not seem well to defer it to the twelfth year, it is highly proper to defer it at least to the seventh year. The reason is that Confirmation has not been instituted as necessary to salvation, but in order that through its virtue we may be found ready and prepared when called upon to fight for the faith of Christ—a combat which no one can for a moment consider that those who still want the use of reason are called on to sustain.

19.—Reverence with which Confirmation should be approached.

From what has been already said, it follows that persons of mature age when about to be confirmed must, if they desire to receive the grace and gifts of this sacrament, not only approach it with faith and devotion, but must also be sorry from their hearts for all the serious sins they may have committed. Hence the pastor must strive to have them make a previous confession of their sins ; exhort them to fasting and other works of piety ; and admonish them to revive that laudable practice of the ancient Church, by virtue of which only those who were fasting received this sacrament—to all of which we cannot but consider it will not be difficult to persuade the faithful if they shall only once have understood the wonderful effects of this sacrament and the graces it confers.

V.—THE EFFECTS OF CONFIRMATION

20.—The effects of Confirmation.

The pastor will, accordingly, show that Confirmation has this in common with the other sacraments that, unless some obstacle is interposed by the person who receives it, it imparts new grace ; for, as has been already explained, all the sacraments are sacred and mystical signs which both denote and produce grace.

(*a*) But besides what it has in common with the other sacraments, it is special to Confirmation first to perfect the grace of Baptism. Those who have been made Christians by Baptism are, like newly-born infants, still weak and soft, but afterwards through the sacrament of Confirmation become strong against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil, while their minds are fully confirmed to confess and glorify the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence doubtless the origin of the very name (of Confirmation).

21.—The word Confirmation—whence derived.

For the word *confirmation* is not derived—as some ignorantly as well as impiously have asserted—from the fact that formerly those who had been baptized in their infancy, were, when grown to mature age, brought before the bishop to *confirm* the profession of faith undertaken by them in Baptism, and thus Confirmation would seem to differ in no way from catechetical instruction. No trustworthy testimony can be adduced in support of this view. On the contrary, the name has been given owing to the fact that by virtue of this sacrament God confirms in us the work begun by Him in Baptism, leading us to the perfection of solid Christian virtue.

(*b*) (The second effect of Confirmation is that) not only does it confirm, but it also gives growth, in grace. On this point Melchiades testifies: "The Holy Ghost by His saving descent, comes down on the waters of Baptism, and in the font imparts plenitude of grace to innocency; but in Confirmation He gives increase to grace." And not only does He increase grace, but He increases it in a wonderful manner, as the Holy Scriptures beautifully signified and expressed by the figure of a garment; *Stay you in the city*, says our Lord speaking of this sacrament, *until you be clothed with power from on high.*[1]

22.—Effect of Confirmation on the Apostles.

But if the pastor wishes to point out the divine efficacy of this sacrament (and his doing so cannot but have the greatest influence in touching the hearts of the faithful), it will be sufficient for him to explain what occurred in the case of the Apostles themselves. Up to the time of the passion, and even during the very hours of the passion itself, they were so weak and timid that on our Lord being seized they instantly ran away; while Peter, who had been marked out as the rock and foundation of the Church, and who had displayed the highest constancy and the greatness of a generous soul, was terrified at the voice of one simple woman, and denied not once or twice, but even a third time, that he was a disciple of Jesus Christ; and even after the resurrection they remained shut up in a house *for fear of the Jews.*[2] But on the day of Pentecost they were all so filled with the power of the Holy Ghost that in disseminating freely and boldly the Gospel entrusted to them not only throughout Judea, but through all the world, they considered that no greater happiness could befall them than to be *accounted worthy to suffer*[1] reproach, chains, torments, and crosses for the name of Christ.

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[1] Luke xxiv. 49.

[2] John xx. 19.

23.—Confirmation imprints a character.

Confirmation has also this effect that it imprints a character and consequently can never be repeated on any account, just as has been already remarked in the case of Baptism, and as will also be set forth later on in the case of Holy Orders.

If all this is frequently and carefully explained by the pastor, it will be almost impossible for the faithful, when once they recognize the excellence and advantage of this sacrament, not to use their utmost endeavours to receive it devoutly and religiously.

VI.—THE CEREMONIES OF CONFIRMATION

24.—Ceremonies used at Confirmation: The anointing of the forehead.

It remains now to give a brief glance at some of the rites and ceremonies used by the Catholic Church in the administration of this sacrament. The pastor will readily understand the advantage arising out of this explanation, if he reverts to what has been already said on this subject.

Those, then, who are confirmed are anointed on the forehead with holy chrism. For in this sacrament the Holy Ghost infuses Himself into the souls of the faithful, and increases within them strength and courage to enable them in the spiritual combat to fight manfully and withstand their bitter foes. The anointing made on the forehead signifies that they are not to be deterred from the open profession of the name of Christ by either fear or shame—the signs of which, as a rule, manifest themselves chiefly on the forehead.

Moreover the mark by which a Christian is distinguished from others, as the soldier is by certain badges, should be impressed on the noblest part of the body.

25.—Time when it should be conferred.

The custom has been solemnly and religiously observed in the Church of God to administer this sacrament at Pentecost especially, because it was on that day that the Apostles were strengthened and confirmed by the power of the Holy Ghost, in memory of which fact the faithful might be admonished to reflect on the many and great mysteries contained in the sacred anointing.

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[1] Acts v. 41.

26.—The stroke on the cheek, and the invocation of peace.

The person anointed and confirmed is then lightly struck on the cheek by the bishop, to put him in mind that like a valiant soldier he must be ready to endure all adversities with unconquered spirit for the name of Christ.

And lastly the peace is given him, that he may understand he has attained the fullness of heavenly grace and *that peace which surpasseth all understanding.*[1]

This, then, is an outline of what the pastor should teach regarding the sacrament of chrism—not so much in empty words and cold language, as in burning zeal for true piety, so as to imprint what he teaches on the souls and inmost thoughts of the faithful.

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[1] Phil. iv. 7.

CHRISM OR CONFIRMATION

Q. What is the sacrament of Confirmation?

A. Confirmation is a sacrament which gives us the Holy Ghost, imprints on our souls the mark of a soldier of Jesus Christ, and makes us perfect Christians.

Q. How does the sacrament of Confirmation make us perfect Christians?

A. The sacrament of Confirmation makes us perfect Christians by confirming us in the faith and perfecting the other virtues and gifts received in Baptism; hence it is called Confirmation.

Q. What gifts of the Holy Ghost are received in Confirmation?

A. The gifts of the Holy Ghost received in Confirmation are these seven: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and the Fear of the Lord.

Q. What is the matter of this sacrament?

A. The matter of this sacrament, besides the imposition of hands by the bishop, is the anointing of the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism; and for this reason it is also called the sacrament of Chrism, that is Anointing.

Q. What is sacred chrism?

A. Sacred chrism is oil of olives mingled with balsam, and consecrated by the bishop on Holy Thursday.

Q. What do the oil and balsam in this sacrament signify?

A. In this sacrament the oil, which is unctious and strengthening, signifies the abounding grace which is diffused over the soul of the Christian to confirm him in his faith; and the balsam, which is fragrant and prevents corruption, signifies that the Christian, strengthened by this grace, is enabled to give forth a good odour of Christian virtue and preserve himself from the corruption of vice.

Q. What is the form of the sacrament of Confirmation?

A. The form of the sacrament of Confirmation is this: *I sign thee with the Sign of the Cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Q. Who is the minister of the sacrament of Confirmation?

A. The ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation is the bishop alone.

Q. How does the bishop administer Confirmation?

A. In administering the sacrament of Confirmation the bishop first stretches his hands over those to be confirmed, and invokes the Holy Ghost upon them; next, he anoints the forehead of each one with sacred chrism in the form of a cross, saying the words of the form; then he gives each one confirmed a light stroke on the cheek with his right hand, saying: *Peace be with you*; finally, he solemnly blesses all those he has confirmed.

Q. Why is the anointing made on the forehead?

A. The anointing is made on the forehead, where signs of fear and shame appear, in order that he who is confirmed may understand that he should not blush at the name and profession of a Christian, nor fear the enemies of his faith.

Q. Why is a light stroke given to the person confirmed?

A. A light stroke is given to the person confirmed to show him that he should be ready to bear all insults and endure all sufferings for the faith of Jesus Christ.

Q. Should all endeavour to receive the sacrament of Confirmation ?

A. Yes, all should endeavour to receive the sacrament of Confirmation and to have those under them receive it.

Q. At what age is it advisable to receive the sacrament of Confirmation ?

A. The age at which it is advisable to receive the sacrament of Confirmation is about the seventh year, because it is then that temptations usually begin, and the grace of the sacrament can be sufficiently discerned and a recollection be had of having received it.

Q. What dispositions are required to receive worthily the sacrament of Confirmation ?

A. To receive worthily the sacrament of Confirmation it is necessary to be in the grace of God ; know the principal mysteries of our holy faith ; and approach it with reverence and devotion.

Q. Would he who received Confirmation a second time be guilty of sin ?

A. He would commit a sacrilege ; because Confirmation is one of the sacraments that imprint a character on the soul and hence may be received only once.

Q. What should a Christian do to preserve the grace of Confirmation ?

A. To preserve the grace of Confirmation a Christian should pray often, do good works, and live according to the laws of Jesus Christ, in spite of human respect.

Q. Why also are there godfathers and godmothers in Confirmation ?

A. In order that they by word and example may show the confirmed the way to eternal life and help him in the spiritual combat.

Q. What qualifications are required in sponsors ?

A. They should be of proper age, Catholics, confirmed, instructed in the necessary truths of religion, and persons of good life.

Q. Does a sponsor in Confirmation contract any relationship with the confirmed and the parents of the confirmed ?

A. The sponsor in Confirmation contracts the same spiritual relationship as is contracted in Baptism.

Seventh Instruction on the Sacraments

CONFIRMATION

After the sacrament of Baptism, which has been already explained, comes the sacrament of Chrism, which is also called Confirmation, because it confirms, perfects, and strengthens that which Baptism has commenced in us.

It is not enough to have received the spiritual life that is given in Baptism. This blessing is indeed sufficient for children who die before the use of reason, but not for those who survive and who are exposed to so many dangers of losing grace. Who can count the number of these dangers ?—dangers within us, and dangers without. *Within us*, through our passions which grow with increasing years, and through that depth of corruption which not rarely anticipates mature years. *Without us*, through bad companions, contagious examples, evil maxims and insinuations. Oh, how easy it is for childhood, thus weak and inexperienced, to turn to evil soon! And if the beginning is bad, what will the consequences be ? Children, then, even though baptized, stand in need of a new remedy to invigorate the spiritual life which is received in Baptism, and which is too weak and feeble to support itself unaided.

In the order of grace we must reason along the same lines as in the order of nature. Just, then, as it is not enough for a child to be born—he must also grow and be strengthened, since even though he possess a true natural life, yet is he weak and unable to protect himself ; so also it is not enough for a Christian to be born spiritually in Baptism, but along with this he needs to be strengthened in the spiritual life so as to be able to preserve it and withstand the dangers that incessantly threaten to rob him of it.

This maturity and strength are prepared for us by our Lord in the sacrament of Confirmation, which is hence called the complement and perfection of Baptism. Clear mention is made of it in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that the Apostles dwelling at Jerusalem, having heard that the deacon Philip had won many of the Samaritans to the Gospel, and had baptized them, sent thither Peter and John in order that the newly-baptized might be confirmed, and receive the Holy Ghost; and this in fact happened: *They laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost.*[1]

Here we see, in practice, the administration of this sacrament —an account which is sufficient to prove its divine institution, even though the date when it was instituted is not precisely known. Certain it is that the Apostles never constituted themselves the authors but only the dispensers of the sacraments—*dispensers of the mysteries of Christ;*[2] and it is furthermore certain that God alone could attach to material and sensible signs the power ot producing spiritual grace.

The sacrament of Confirmation, then, is a sacrament which confers the Holy Spirit, with the abundance of His graces, on the baptized, rendering them perfect Christians, and enabling them to confess at all costs the faith of Jesus Christ.

According to the common opinion, which is also based on custom and practice, the *matter* of this sacrament is the anointing with sacred chrism made on the forehead; and the *form* consists in these words which accompany the anointing: "I sign thee with the sign of the Cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

At the same time we should not forget to mention that others hold that what is essential is the imposition of hands, which the bishop makes in the beginning over all who are to be confirmed—an action denoting the descent of the Holy Ghost who thus comes to rest on the persons confirmed; and the prayer which he pronounces at the same time, and which denotes the gifts and graces the Holy Ghost infuses over their hearts. In this view, those who intend to be confirmed should not omit to be present during the imposition of hands and its accompanying prayer. And, even though there were no question of assuring the validity of the sacrament, it will be always advisable to be present since the Council of Trent has expressly declared that the bishop does not in vain repeat the words: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"—words that are said only at the beginning of the function.

The ordinary minister of this sacrament is the bishop alone; for that reason the two Apostles, Peter and John, because clothed with the episcopal character, were sent to the people of Samaria. The reason is that as the fullness of the Holy Ghost and of Christian sanctification is given in Confirmation, it is the privilege of those alone to confer it who possess the plenitude of the priesthood. Such are the bishops.

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[1] Acts viii. 17.

[2] 1 Cor. iv. 1.

The effects of Confirmation are two. The first is to impress on the soul a special character which, like that of Baptism, can never be effaced, and can, therefore, like Baptism, be received only once. This character is a sign that we are enlisted in the army of Christ; and just as the character of Baptism makes us Christians, so does the character of Confirmation make us soldiers of Christ, and as soldiers of Christ we are bound to defend the faith under all circumstances, even at the cost of our lives.

To accomplish this object, the Holy Ghost is given to us with the abundance of His gifts and graces, and this is the second effect of Confirmation. It is true that in all the sacraments we receive the Holy Ghost; but He does not produce the same effect in all, but varies His operations in a wonderful way according to the nature of each sacrament. In Baptism, He gives us the grace of purity, simplicity, brightness, and innocence, making us, as St. Peter says, like *newly-born children;* and in Confirmation He gives us the grace of strength, which confirms ever more and more within us faith, hope, and charity—the virtues infused in Baptism—and which enables us to confess Jesus Christ by word and deed, and advance in piety, in spite of all the temptations roused up against us by the world, the flesh, and the devil. "In this sacrament," says St. Thomas, "is given the plenitude of the Holy Spirit for the strengthening of grace."

Should you desire to see visibly the difference between the grace of Baptism and that of Confirmation, consider it in the Apostles: How different they were after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them on the day of Pentecost from what they were before! Before that day they had lain hidden, were timid and cowardly, even so far as to desert Jesus Christ, and deny they had been His disciples; but after the coming of the Holy Ghost, like lions breathing fire, they were courageous in spite of all human power, and became undaunted preachers of the name of Jesus in the very public squares, and that in spite of threats, scourges, and even death itself. Now, as Confirmation is for us Christians nothing else in substance than the Pentecost of the Apostles, that Spirit which they then received, enabling them to fulfil the duties of their mission, the very same Spirit do we receive in Confirmation to enable us to discharge the duties of perfect Christians —a spirit of strength, of courage, of generosity, of zeal, of ardour in the constant practice of the Gospel and in defending and supporting it against the evil-living and the scandalous who are found in every place.

But you may say: We, too, have received this sacrament, and yet it does not seem to us that we have experienced effects such as these. In reply, I have first of all to ask: Have you received Confirmation with the proper spirit and preparation, or have you received it unworthily as only too often happens? In the next place bear in mind that even though it has been properly received its virtue is received only as a principle. Let me explain. A man endowed with marvellous strength is not conscious of that strength except at the moment in which he uses it. The same thing happens in the case in question. On special occasions the value of the sacrament is experienced, just as the first Christians experienced it in times of persecution, and it is experienced infallibly, provided no obstacle is put in the way by sin; for just as sin hinders the grace of the sacrament in its actual reception, so does it hinder the effects of the same grace at the moment in which it should be exercised.

From all this, you will have inferred the necessity of Confirmation—not indeed its absolute necessity, as is the case with Baptism, but its necessity as a matter of precept. Hence they who are able to receive it, and who neglect to do so, are guilty of sin, both because they disobey Jesus Christ who has not instituted this sacrament in vain, and because they wilfully deprive themselves of the graces annexed thereto. What would you think of a traveller who, setting out on a road infested by thieves or wild beasts, should refuse the arms offered him for his defence? Now, such a traveller is the image of a Christian exposed to the dangers of this world. In Confirmation Jesus Christ has prepared a spiritual and powerful weapon for him, and advises him to receive it: *Take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day.*[1] If he neglects it, he is culpable, and exposes himself to the evident risk of succumbing to his spiritual enemies.

Hence parents also sin who do not see that their children are confirmed as soon as they arrive at a suitable age. If it concerns them so closely for their children to attain perfect vigour of body, should they not be much more closely concerned for their attaining perfect vigour of soul? By Baptism they remain always children in the spiritual life, but they become strong and perfect Christians only by Confirmation.

It only remains for us now to examine the dispositions requisite to receive this sacrament properly in accordance with the present discipline of the Church. Formerly it was conferred on all infants immediately after Baptism, and in that case grace, like character, always produced its effect; but later on the Church ordained otherwise. Whether it was to remove all danger of receiving it twice—that is, by receiving it at an age when its first reception had been forgotten, or whether it was to enable us to receive it with greater fruit, by receiving it with the use of reason, and at that precise period of life when temptations begin to make themselves felt—at any rate, the Church has ordained that outside danger of death, or some such special exception, it is to be received at an age of sufficient reason.

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[1] Eph. vi. 13.

But if a certain discernment is requisite to receive it properly, may there not, on the other hand, be danger of profaning it by malice such as that of grave sin? If so, conclude that as often as children have lost their baptismal innocence by mortal sin they must recover it by Confession, or, in case of necessity, by perfect contrition, because Confirmation is one of the sacraments of the living which is consequently destined to increase grace, not give it in the first instance; and as in the natural life it is not possible to increase the growth of a dead child, so also the Christian in mortal sin cannot grow in the spiritual life.

There is also required, in those who are to be confirmed, no matter how innocent they may be, a knowledge of the principal mysteries and articles of our faith, because at their age faith is a matter of strict obligation, and without it they would not even be capable of absolution. Moreover, as the grace of the sacrament always corresponds to the greater or less degree of preparation, so should children about to be confirmed be advised to remain for some time previous, like the Apostles, in devout recollection, and to guard against the distraction which might easily arise from the noise and confusion of the crowd that usually assembles on the occasion of the solemn administration of this sacrament.

This, then, is the disposition with which those who are to be confirmed should approach the sacrament; and as a knowledge of the rites and ceremonies used by the bishop in its administration is of great utility in exciting such dispositions, I shall briefly glance at their signification.

The imposition of hands signifies the presence and protection of the Holy Ghost overshadowing the soul. The anointing with sacred chrism also denotes the multiform grace of the sacrament. This chrism is composed of oil and balsam consecrated by the bishop on Holy Thursday. Now as oil possesses the property of softening and strengthening, so the interior grace of the Holy Ghost strengthens the soul against the enemies of salvation, and softens all that may be hard and difficult to nature in the observance of Christian duties.

In like manner, as balsam possesses the property of hindering corruption and of diffusing an agreeable odour, so does the grace of the sacrament preserve us from the corruption of sin, and make us the good odour of Jesus Christ by a life of true edification to our neighbour.

This anointing is made in the form of a cross on the forehead which is the seat of modesty as well as the most visible part of the body, to denote that the cross is the Christian's standard and that we should never be ashamed of it. Finally, the bishop gives a light stroke on the cheek, showing thereby that we must be ready to undergo every kind of trial and suffering for the faith ; it is in doing this that we find true peace of heart, a wish with which the bishop dismisses us when the sacrament has been conferred.

And now, when the sacrament has been received, what remains to be done ? Return thanks to God, and take to ourselves the warning of St. Paul : *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed.*[1] On the day of Confirmation the Holy Spirit takes possession of our souls ; let us therefore take care not to drive Him forth from our hearts by sinning anew, but rather let us strive to preserve and increase the grace we have received.

All depends on a good beginning. If our childhood and youth are well-regulated and Christian, the power and holy fear of God will accompany us through all our later years, and the first fruits of a life consecrated to God will sanctify its whole course. But if, unfortunately, we go astray from the very beginning, we shall render useless the grace of holiness received in Baptism, and the grace of strength received in Confirmation, and thus the devil, finding no obstacle or resistance, will drive us to the extremes of vice and will interpose no small difficulties in the way of our return to the right path. Let us, then, cultivate the grace so lately received —this, of course, applies to all those who have been recently confirmed.

With regard to the others of us—those, that is, who have been confirmed for a length of time or for many years—we should frequently pray God to deign to awaken in us the grace of Confirmation, especially when we find ourselves exposed to certain trials and dangers.

Let me explain. Thanks to God, we are no longer in the times when it was necessary to confess the faith before persecutors and tyrants, or on the scaffold ; yet there are not wanting other sorts of combats for us to sustain, and they are those inflicted on us by unbelieving and evil-living Christians, who spread bad teaching, who promote the cause of bad morals, who ridicule the practice of piety and religion. Our faith and religion are always opposed by such as these, and against such as these we must be ready to profess our faith openly ; nor can we do so without encountering opposition, hatred, and persecution, to conquer which we are unable of ourselves, without the grace which is imparted in this sacrament. Oh, how many are there who, through base human respect, betray the interests of God and of conscience, fall away from doing good, and enter on the path to evil! But if a miserable human respect is sufficient to make us transgress, what would become of us if, like the first Christians, we were every moment in danger of martyrdom ? Should we not be just so many apostates and deserters ?

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[1] Eph. iv. 30

But apart altogether from the consideration that we have from time to time to face certain persons, what strength do we not need to preserve the integrity of our faith in the midst of the unbelief that is met with everywhere ; to preserve the purity of our lives in the midst of the laxity, scandal, and excess that surround us, and not be drawn away by the impetuous current of the world's ways ; in fine to preserve the holy fear of God with Christian fervour and recollection, in the midst of such neglect of Christian piety ? In a word everything conspires to lead us astray and destroy us.

See, then, the necessity of recommending ourselves to God, and begging Him that He may cause to flourish in us ever more and more that grace of strength and courage He gave us in Confirmation : *Confirm, O God, what Thou hast wrought in us.*[1] Thus shall we be able at the proper time and place to guard the interests of God, and even confound evil-doers and put them to shame ; thus also we shall not fear mockery and derision, nor shall we ever allow ourselves to deviate from our duty on any consideration whatever ; if nothing else, we shall leave it to others *to say*, while we ourselves shall *do* all things well and courageously as becomes *the good soldier of Christ.*[2]

And in this connexion, let us remember the words of Jesus Christ—which exactly apply to the obligations contracted by us in this sacrament—with reference to a full and open profession of our faith : *Everyone therefore that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven ; but he that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*[3]

A day, then, shall come in which we shall either be recognized by Jesus Christ as His own, or rejected by Him—eternally sealed either as His friends or as His enemies. That day shall surely come, and it shall come soon. Let us, then, never lose sight of it, and the thought of it will encourage us to declare ourselves for Him now and never allow ourselves to be influenced by human considerations in anything that concerns the honour of God, the cause of religion, our duty as Christians derived from Baptism, and as soldiers of Christ from Confirmation. This is the fruit I desire to draw from this instruction.

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[1] Ps. lxvii. 29. [2] 2 Tim. ii. 3. [3] Matt. x. 32, 33.

CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—The reverence due to this sacrament.

OF all the mysteries which our Lord and Saviour has bequeathed to us as the sure channels of divine grace there is none that can for a moment be compared with the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist ; and so also no severer punishment is to be feared from God for any crime whatever, than for the unholy and irreligious use of that which is full of all holiness, or rather which contains the very Author and Source of all holiness. This the Apostle wisely understood—on this he has unmistakably given us warning. For, having declared how enormous was the guilt of those *who discerned not the body of the Lord,* he immediately went on to add : *Therefore are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep.*[1] In order, then, that the faithful may understand that divine honours are due to this heavenly sacrament, and that they may derive thence abundant fruits of grace, and escape the most just anger of God, the pastor will set forth with the greatest possible care all that may seem calculated to throw greater light on the majesty of this sacrament.

I.—INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

2.—Its institution.

For this purpose, and following the example of St. Paul who professed that he delivered to the Corinthians that which he himself had received from the Lord, the pastor must, first of all, explain to the faithful how this sacrament was instituted. Now, here is what the Evangelist, in the most unmistakable language, tells us of the institution of the Blessed Sacrament :—

Our Lord *having loved His own who were in the world, He*

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 30.

loved them to the end,[1] and, knowing that His hour was come when He was to pass out of this world to the Father, in order to leave them a divine and admirable pledge of that love, and to be ever present with his own, He in His unutterable wisdom brought that to pass which transcends all the order and condition of nature. For when He had celebrated the supper of the Paschal Lamb with His disciples, He, in order that the figure might give way to the reality—the shadow to the substance—*took bread, and giving thanks* to God, *blessed and brake and gave to His disciples, and said: Take ye and eat, this is My Body which shall be delivered for you; this do for a commemoration of Me. In like manner* He took *the chalice also, after He had supped, saying: This Chalice is the New Testament in My Blood; this do, as often as you shall drink it, in commemoration of Me.*[2]

3—Various names given to this sacrament.

Convinced of the impossibility of being able to convey by any one term an accurate idea of the dignity and excellence of this sacrament, sacred writers have tried to express it by a variety of terms.

The Eucharist.

Thus they sometimes call it the Eucharist, a word which we, with good reason, may take to mean either "Excellent Grace," or "Thanksgiving." It is an excellent grace, either because it is a foretaste of eternal life, concerning which it is written: *The grace of God is life everlasting*[3]; or because it contains Jesus Christ, who is grace itself and the source of all grace,

It is also correctly rendered Thanksgiving, since in immolating this all pure Victim we daily return boundless thanks to God for all the blessings with which He has loaded us, and especially for the perfect gift of grace which He bestows on us in this sacrament.

Moreover, the word is fully in keeping with the circumstances that accompanied the institution of this mystery. For, *taking bread, He brake it and gave thanks.* And the Psalmist, contemplating the greatness of this mystery, cried out: *He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and a gracious Lord; He hath given food to them that fear Him.*[4] But immediately before these words the Psalmist made an act of thanksgiving, when he says: *His work is praise and magnificence.*

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[1] John xiii. i. [2] Matt. xxvi. 26; Mark xiv. 22; Luke xxii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24.
[3] Rom. vi. 23. [4] Ps. cx. 4.

4.—Other names. It is often given the name of Sacrifice also, concerning which there will, later on, be occasion to speak at greater length.

Communion. It is also called Communion—a word clearly taken from the passage of the Apostle: *The chalice of benediction, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread, which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?*[1] For, as St. John Damascene explains, this sacrament unites us to Christ, makes us partakers of His flesh and divinity, and reconciles and unites us to each other in Him, making us to be one single body.

The sacrament of Peace and Charity. It is for this reason that it is called the sacrament of Peace and Charity—terms that show us clearly how unworthy of the name of Christian are those who entertain enmities towards others, and with what zeal we should banish far from us those baneful pests, hatred, dissension, and discord; all the more so inasmuch as by this daily Sacrifice of our religion we profess that we desire before all things to preserve peace and charity.

5.—Called also the Viaticum. Sacred writers also give it the name of Viaticum both because it is the spiritual food which sustains us in the pilgrimage of this life, and because it keeps us on the road that leads to eternal bliss and glory. It is for this reason that the practice has been always observed in the Catholic Church to allow no one to die without being fortified by this sacrament.

And the Supper. In fine some of the most ancient of the Fathers, following the authority of the Apostle, have sometimes given to the Eucharist the name Supper, because instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ at the saving mystery of the Last Supper.

6.—To be consecrated and received fasting. Though this is true, it would not be right to conclude that it is lawful to consecrate or receive the Eucharist after food or drink. This salutary usage of administering it only to persons fasting, which according to the ancient writers was introduced by the Apostles themselves, has always been retained and observed.

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[1] I Cor. x. 16.

THE BLESSED EUCHARIST

1. THE NATURE OF THIS SACRAMENT—THE REAL PRESENCE

Q. What is the sacrament of the Eucharist ?

A. The Eucharist is a sacrament in which by the marvellous conversion of the whole substance of bread into the Body of Jesus Christ, and of that of wine into His precious Blood, is contained truly, really, and substantially, the Body, the Blood, the Soul and Divinity of the same Lord Jesus Christ, under appearance of bread and wine as our spiritual food.

Q. In the Eucharist is there the same Jesus Christ who is in heaven, and who was born on earth of the Blessed Virgin ?

A. Yes, in the Eucharist there is truly the same Jesus Christ who is in heaven, and who was born on earth of the Blessed Virgin.

Q. Why do you believe that in the Eucharist Jesus Christ is really present ?

A. I believe that in the Eucharist Jesus Christ is truly present, because He Himself has said it, and holy Church teaches it.

Q. What is the matter of the sacrament of the Eucharist ?

A. The matter of the sacrament of the Eucharist is that which was used by Jesus Christ Himself, that is, wheaten bread and wine of the vine.

Q. What is the form of the sacrament of the Eucharist ?

A. The form of the sacrament of the Eucharist consists of the words used by Jesus Christ Himself : *This is My Body : This is My Blood.*

Q. What is the host before consecration ?

A. The host before consecration is bread.

Q. After consecration what is the host ?

A. After consecration the host is the true Body of our Lord Jesus Christ under the species of bread.

Q. What is in the chalice before consecration ?

A. In the chalice before consecration there is wine with a few drops of water.

Q. After consecration what is in the chalice ?

A. After consecration there is in the chalice the true Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the species of wine.

Q. When does the change of the bread into the Body and of the wine into the Blood of Jesus Christ take place ?

A. The change of the bread into the Body and of the wine into the Blood of Jesus Christ is made in the very moment in which the priest pronounces the words of consecration during holy Mass.

Q. What is the consecration ?

A. The consecration is the renewal, by means of the priest, of the miracle wrought by Jesus Christ at Last Supper, of changing bread and wine into His adorable Body and Blood by saying : *This is My Body : This is My Blood.*

Q. What does the Church call the miraculous change of bread and of wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ ?

A. The Church calls the miraculous change which is daily wrought upon our altars *transubstantiation.*

Q. Who gave this great power to the words of consecration?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is Almighty God, gave this great power to the words of consecration.

Q. Is there nothing left of the bread and of the wine after consecration?

A. After consecration the species of the bread and of the wine alone are left.

Q. What are the species of the bread and of the wine?

A. The species of the bread and of the wine are the quantity and sensible qualities of the bread and of the wine, such as the form, the colour, and the taste.

Q. How can the species of the bread and of the wine remain without their substance?

A. The species of the bread and of the wine remain without their substance in a wonderful way by the power of God Almighty.

Q. Under the species of the bread is there only the Body of Jesus Christ and under the species of the wine only His Blood?

A. Both under the species of the bread and under the species of the wine the living Jesus Christ is all present, with His Body, His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity.

Q. Can you tell me why Jesus Christ is whole and entire both in the host and in the chalice?

A. Both in the host and in the chalice Jesus Christ is whole and entire, because He is living and immortal in the Eucharist as He is in heaven; hence where His Body is, there also are His Blood, His Soul, and His Divinity; and where His Blood is, there also are His Body, His Soul and His Divinity, all these being inseparable in Jesus Christ.

Q. When Jesus Christ is in the host does He cease to be in heaven?

A. When Jesus Christ is in the host He does not cease to be in heaven, but is at one and the same time in heaven and in the Blessed Sacrament.

Q. Is Jesus Christ present in all the consecrated hosts in the world?

A. Yes, Jesus Christ is present in all consecrated hosts in the world.

Q. How can Jesus Christ be present in all the consecrated hosts in the world?

A. Jesus Christ is present in all the consecrated hosts in the world by the Omnipotence of God, to whom nothing is impossible.

Q. When the host is broken is the Body of Jesus Christ broken also?

A. When the host is broken, the Body of Jesus Christ is not broken, but only the species of the bread are broken.

Q. In which part of the host is the Body of Jesus Christ?

A. The Body of Jesus Christ is entire in all the parts into which the host is broken.

Q. Is Jesus Christ just as much in a particle of a host as in a large host?

A. Just as much in a particle of a host as in a large host there is the same Jesus Christ.

Q. Why is the Most Blessed Eucharist preserved in our churches?

A. The Most Blessed Eucharist is preserved in our churches that It may be adored by the faithful, and brought to the sick when necessary.

Q. Ought the Eucharist to be adored?

A. The Eucharist ought to be adored by all, because it contains really, truly, and substantially, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Eighth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE BLESSED EUCHARIST: ITS INSTITUTION AND NATURE

IT is now our duty to consider the sacrament of the Eucharist—a sacrament ordained to strengthen within us the spiritual life that has been restored through Confession—a sacrament the holiest, the most august, and called *par excellence* The Sacrament—a sacrament which contains the most hidden mysteries of the wisdom of God, the most beautiful traits of His Omnipotence, the most lovable efforts of His goodness—a sacrament, in fine, in which, to use the words of the Prophet, Jesus Christ has epitomized and compendiated all His wonders : *He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and a gracious Lord ; He hath given food to them that fear Him.*[1] In order to have a proper idea of this great sacrament, we shall consider the following points :—

1. Its institution, and the different parts that constitute it.
2. The principal truths of faith to be held in reference to it.
3. The various ends for which it was instituted ; especially that of being our food in sacramental Communion.
4. The dispositions necessary to receive it worthily and advantageously.
5. The wonderful effects it produces in our souls, and hence,
6. The frequent use we should make of it.

What, then, is the sacrament of the Eucharist ? It is that sacrament which really and truly contains the body and blood, soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine.

This sacrament, as you well know, was instituted by Jesus Christ at the last supper which He took with His disciples on the eve of His passion. The holy Evangelists tell us that having eaten the paschal lamb, which was a figure of this sacrament, He rose from the table and washed the feet of His disciples ; then, sitting down to table once more, He took bread, and raising His eyes to heaven, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying *Take ye and eat :* THIS IS MY BODY. In like manner He took a chalice or cup of wine, blessed it and gave it to them, saying : *All of you take and drink of this :* THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD.[1]

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[1] Ps. cx. 4.

Then it was that He consecrated the Eucharist for the first time. The words pronounced by Jesus Christ accomplished invisibly the great miracle of changing bread and wine into His very body and blood. And as this miracle was to be perpetuated in the Church, Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles and, in their person, to the bishops and priests, their successors, the power of doing, down to the end of time, the self-same thing which He himself had done, for He said to them : *Do this for a commemoration of Me*—as much as to say : I give you the power to do for ever that which you have seen Me do ; bless bread and wine in My name ; say the self-same words that I have said ; and these words which you will pronounce in My name shall have the same power on your lips as they have had on Mine : *Do this for a commemoration of Me.*

Thus Jesus Christ commanded the Apostles, ordaining them in that very moment priests of the New Testament, and prescribing for them the matter and form they were to use. Hence, in the self-same manner in which the Eucharist was instituted, in that very same way is it now accomplished in the time of holy Mass, the priest takes the same matter as was used by Christ—that is bread and wine—he pronounces the same words as were used by Christ, which constitute the form of the sacrament : THIS IS MY BODY : THIS IS MY BLOOD ; and in virtue of these words the adorable mystery is daily renewed and perpetuated on our altars.

It is a mystery that is named by Sacred Scripture and by the Fathers, the *Mystery of Faith.* And with good reason ; for there is no other mystery which so tests our faith, because of the many and varied wonders it contains in itself. Recognize this in the brief exposition I am now about to make of all those truths which in this sacrament the holy Catholic Church proposes for our belief—for our belief, I repeat, and not for our discussion or examination,

1. The first truth is the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist—that is, in virtue of the words of consecration pronounced by the priest over the bread and wine, there is made to be present, not merely metaphorically or figuratively, as the Calvinists pretend, but truly, really, corporeally, and substantially, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, true God and true Man—the very Jesus who was born of

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[1] Matt. xxvi. 26.

the virginal womb of Mary, who died on the cross and arose again, and who now sits gloriously at the right hand of His divine Father. Of this we are assured both by the words in which Jesus Christ expressed Himself when He promised to institute this sacrament, and by the words used by Him when actually instituting it.

(*a*) By the words He used *when He promised to institute this sacrament.* Immediately after the wondrous multiplication of loaves wrought by Him in the desert, He took advantage of that miracle to excite the multitude who were astonished at such a prodigy, to the consideration of a still greater prodigy—of another bread that was not earthly, but spiritual and divine, which He intended to give them, and this bread was He Himself. *I*, he said, *am the living bread come down from heaven ;* I will give it to you, and this bread will be My very flesh which I am to offer for the salvation of the world : *The bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world . . . My flesh is truly meat and My blood is truly drink ; He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*[1] So literally were His words taken that they said to one another in wonder and surprise : Is He dreaming, or is He mad ? How can it be possible for Him to give us His flesh to eat ? *How can this man give us His flesh to eat ?* Yet Jesus Christ so far from replying that His words were to be understood in a figurative and not a literal sense—an explanation that would have removed every difficulty—insisted anew and with still greater force on what He had already said, for He added : *I solemnly say unto you : Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you ; for My flesh is truly meat and My blood is truly drink ;*[2] and He repeated and reconfirmed the self-same assertion : *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him.*[3]

(*b*) *The words used* by Jesus Christ *in the actual institution of the sacrament* are as clear and precise as anything ever was. He did not say : Take ye and eat : this is a figure of My body ; but He did say : *This is My Body.* And for still greater clearness, He added that the body He was giving was the self-same body that was ere long to be sacrificed, and the self-same blood that was ere long to be shed for the remission of sins : *My body which shall be given for you—My blood which shall be shed for you.* Now, as the body and blood offered up by Jesus on the Cross were real beyond any shadow of doubt, so also are the body and blood given to us in the Eucharist true and real. The real presence, then, of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament could not be more clearly expressed ; nor could He use more significant language to declare whether it was really His intention to institute it.

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[1] John vi. 52-57. [2] John vi. 54. [3] John vi. 57.

From this first truth we should infer the dignity and pre-eminence of this sacrament above all the others—a dignity and pre-eminence beyond compare. For, the other sacraments contain the grace of Jesus Christ, variously diversified according to the various ends of each sacrament ; but in this sacrament is contained the very Author of grace Himself. The other sacraments are channels of grace ; but this is the fountain and source of grace.

2. You must not, however, be led to believe, according to the error of the Lutherans which has been condemned by the Church, that after consecration the bread and wine are still present conjointly with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. No ; and this is the second truth proposed by faith for our belief in connexion with this mystery —and it is, that by consecration the entire substance of bread and wine ceases to be, and is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

What, then, remains of the bread and wine ? Nothing but the accidents—the sensible qualities—alone ; that is to say, the form, the odour, the colour, the taste. If we consult our senses—our sight, taste, touch, smell—it seems to be still bread and wine ; but faith teaches us that what to our eyes seems to be still bread and wine is no longer bread and wine, but is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. Now this is that wonderful change which is quite properly called Transubstantiation—that is, the change of one substance into another—a change solidly founded on the words of Jesus already mentioned in which He did not say : In this bread or along with this bread, there is My body ; but simply : *This is My body.*

It will be necessary to dwell on this most difficult point at greater length and with the utmost attention ; and in order to have some idea of the change that takes place, we must keep before our minds a very clear and distinct notion of certain words used in connexion with this change. These words are *substance* and *accidents* which, according to the opinion implied in the Church's teaching on Transubstantiation, form the constituent parts of every object we see around us.

Take any object you wish—water, for instance—and consider it attentively for a moment, and ask yourselves in what does that water really consist. You will observe that it does not consist in quantity, for a single drop of water is just as truly and really water as the whole boundless ocean ; nor in colour, for water still remains water be it ever so much coloured ; nor is it in taste and smell, for water may be changed in these respects, while remaining water still; nor is it in form or shape, for water is water no matter the shape of the vessel in which it is contained. Hence it is clear that water remains water, no matter how much you vary its size, shape, colour, taste, smell, and general appearance; and from this it is also clear that water consists in none of these things, but that besides them all there is something abiding and permanent—something that does not depend on size, shape, colour, taste, or smell—something which we cannot see, but which we know is so real and so essential that water cannot exist without it. Now, that permanent something which makes water to be what it is, is what we call the substance of water; while the varying qualities of size, shape, colour, taste, and smell, which come and go, increase and diminish, without affecting the substance, are what we call accidents, because it is their nature to vary indefinitely. We also call them species or appearances because it is by means of them that the substance which we cannot see nor feel becomes manifested, and, so to say, appears to us.

It is the same with any other object—take bread and regard it in the same way, and you will find that bread is bread no matter how much you may change its size, shape, colour, taste, and smell—that the smallest crumb is just as truly and really bread, as the largest imaginable loaf; in other words, you will see that there is a wide difference between the abiding, essential, substance of bread and the changing, varying nature of the accidents or appearances under which it becomes manifest to us.

The self-same remarks apply to wine, as you will readily see if you consider the matter for a moment.

So much for substance and accidents. Let us now turn our attention to the various kinds of changes that objects undergo. First of all there is that class of change that affects the accidents or appearances alone, and this is the commonest class of change—a change in size, or shape, or colour, or taste, or smell, or in several of these together, leaving the substance of the thing itself unchanged.

The next class of change is that affecting the substance as well as the accidents; such, for instance, as the change that takes place of the food we eat into our blood, and flesh, and bone. Here, as you will observe, not only are the appearances or accidents completely changed, but the very substance of the food we have eaten ceases to be what it was, and is changed into blood, and flesh, and bone. Such changes occur gradually and naturally, though occasionally they occur suddenly and miraculously, as happened when our Lord changed water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana. In that case both substance and accidents ceased to be the substance and accidents of water, and by the power of God became the substance and accidents of wine.

Thus far we have seen there are two classes of natural changes —one, in which the accidents alone are changed, while the substance remains unchanged; the second, in which both accidents and substance are changed; now there is only one other conceivable class of change, and that is that the substance should be changed while the accidents remain exactly as they were before. In the ordinary course of nature this never happens—never can happen; but in the course of God's boundless providence, it does happen, and it happens precisely when by the power of God the substance of bread and wine is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. The accidents or appearances remain unchanged and just as they were before, but the substance has ceased to be, and in its place we have the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

And how do we know this is the case? Simply because He Himself assures us of it. *This*, He said, holding in His holy hands what had been and what still seemed to be bread, *This is My body* —no longer bread, even though it seems to be, but the true substance of the body of the Lord.

He has said it, and who shall call it into doubt? Who shall dare say that is impossible which God has assured us really takes place? If God was able to change Lot's wife into a pillar of salt; the rod of Aaron into a serpent; the waters of Egypt into blood; and water into wine at the feast of Cana in Galilee; why could He not effect a change that is similar in certain respects? "Of old, in Cana of Galilee," says St. Justin, "He changed water into wine, which is akin to blood; shall we consider Him unworthy of faith now that He has changed wine into blood?" Nay, remarks St. Ambrose, if we believe that God was able to create all things out of nothing, should we not more easily believe that He is able to change one substance into another? If bread and wine by a natural, if incomprehensible, power are daily changed into the body and blood of the person who eats or drinks them, why should we not believe that they may be converted by Almighty power into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

This second truth of faith leads us to note another twofold difference between this and the other sacraments.

(*a*) The first is that in the other sacraments the matter of the sacrament is not changed, but remains the same; for instance, the water in Baptism, the oil in Extreme Unction; but in the Eucharist the substance of the matter is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, while of the bread and wine there remains nothing but the sensible qualities alone.

(*b*) The second is that the other sacraments are accomplished in a transient way, and, properly speaking, do not exist outside the act in which they are administered and received; while the Eucharist is a permanent sacrament. For the substance of the bread and wine being converted into the substance of the body and blood of our Lord at the moment when the priest pronounces the words of consecration, once this change has taken place Jesus Christ remains under the appearances of bread and wine as long as the appearances themselves last, His presence being conjoined to them in such a way that it never ceases to continue under them as long as they are not destroyed or altered to such an extent that the bread could no longer be called bread, or the wine no longer wine.

From the permanent presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist under the sacramental appearances is derived the obligation of adoring the Blessed Sacrament with real worship, both internal and external. And truly, if we adore Jesus Christ in the manger, or on the Cross, much more should we adore Him in the Eucharist, where He really dwells, with all the plenitude of His Divinity, it being of course clearly understood that our adoration is not given to the sacramental appearances, but to Jesus Christ hidden under them.

3. The third truth is that Jesus Christ is whole and entire in the host just as in the chalice, as much under the appearance of bread as under the appearance of wine, although for different reasons. Let me explain. Precisely in virtue of the words of consecration which accomplish exactly what they signify, the bread is converted into the body alone, and the wine into the blood alone. But as Jesus Christ is living, glorious, and immortal in the Eucharist, and as His glorified body is a living, indivisible body, so by natural concomitance His blood and His soul must be present along with His body in the host, and along with His blood in the chalice are present His body and His soul; and finally, by reason of the Hypostatic Union with the Humanity, there is also present His Divinity—in a word, Jesus Christ whole and entire, both as God and as man.

Nay, not only is Jesus Christ whole and entire under the appearances of either bread or wine, but He is also present whole and entire under the smallest particle of each species; just like our soul, which is entire and indivisible in the whole body and in each part of the body; or just as one man speaking may be heard by thousands and thousands of people;

or just like a mirror which, when broken, will reflect back an image from each one of its parts. This is clearly gathered from the Gospel; for Jesus Christ did not consecrate one by one the several portions with which He gave Communion to His Apostles, but He consecrated at one time as much as sufficed to communicate them all; and nevertheless He said to each of them that they received His divine Person.

Hence it follows that on the host being divided, the species alone are divided, and not the body of Jesus Christ which always remains entire, and which those who receive it receive whole and entire, even though they only receive the smallest fragment of the consecrated host.

Oh, what an abyss of wonders is not contained in this divine sacrament! and with what reason is it not called by the Church *the mystery of faith!* And indeed in the other mysteries we believe that which we do not see; but here not only we must believe what we do not see, but even the very contrary to what we seem to see—we must believe that on the words of consecration being pronounced :—

(1.) The whole substance of bread and wine ceases to be, without its accidents being destroyed in any way;

(2.) That these accidents remain without the support of their own substance, and produce all the effects of that substance which is no longer present—we see bread, but it is not bread; we taste bread, but it is not bread; the different processes by which bread is preserved, changed, corrupted, are evident, but bread it is not;

(3.) That the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, takes the place of the substance of the bread and wine;

(4.) That the true body of Jesus Christ, without being in the least diminished or lessened, is contained within the narrow boundary of a particle; nay even that like the pure spirits He is there in His true substance in such a way as to be whole and entire in the very smallest part of the consecrated bread and wine;

(5.) That, finally, the self-same body of Jesus Christ, without being multiplied, is at one and the same time in heaven and in the host—nay, in every place in which consecrated particles are preserved.

Such, then, is a group of miracles that, just as they are certain to our faith, so are they far above our limited intelligence and capacity. Even so, what then? Shall we dare to doubt or discredit that which is proposed for our belief by God Himself? What is our idea of God, of His wisdom, of His truth, of His omnipotence, of all that He is?

If the difficulties encountered by our feeble reason in this mystery were sufficient to refuse it our belief, it should also be refused to several other articles that are equally incomprehensible, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection of the body—nay, several natural truths that are most certain though inexplicable. Either, then, on the one hand, do not believe anything that surpasses our understanding, which amounts to rejecting the evidence of many things which cannot be denied though they cannot be explained—which amounts, too, to setting limits to the divine power which can do all things, and which would do so little if it were only able to accomplish those things that are on a level with our understanding; or, on the other hand, in all things submit equally to the authority of God.

And thus it is. The moment that God reveals a truth, be it understood or not understood, there is no alternative but to believe. And this is the only reasonable course; for if the truths proposed for our belief are obscure and unintelligible in themselves, they are clear and luminous in the external support derived from divine revelation, and from the infallible word of God, to resist which is downright rashness and a still greater abuse of our reason. That which comes from God, the First and Essential Truth, cannot but be true; while on the other hand divine Omnipotence is capable of accomplishing infinitely more than we are capable of imagining; hence, St. Augustine wisely remarked: "Let us acknowledge that God can do what we confess we cannot fathom."

Let us, then, stir up our faith, and protest in the sight of God that no matter how much our senses and our understanding may object, we firmly believe with our whole soul and our whole heart in the august and ineffable mystery of the Eucharist, as it has ever been believed in by the Church from the very beginning down to our own days. The Jews went away murmuring amongst themselves with an air of incredulity when they heard these truths proposed; but Jesus did not deign to satisfy their curiosity, and His only reply was that they should believe, thus teaching them that in the mysteries of God we must seek neither the how nor the why, but trust blindly in His divine word—in acting thus consists all the merit of our faith: *Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.*[1]

As good Catholics, all here unhesitatingly believe in this mystery; but it should also be our aim to back up our faith by a life in keeping therewith, so as not to afford heretics any new ground for remaining obstinate in their incredulity.

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[1] John xx. 29.

All the difficulties made by them can be and are triumphantly answered. There is, however, one extrinsic difficulty to which I do not well know how to reply—one which must certainly cover us with shame. They assert that this mystery is not believed in, even by us Catholics; and on what do they base their charge? On the irreverence, the profanation, and the scandals they witness in our churches. How is it possible, they urge, in face of the undevotional and far from respectful attitude frequently adopted by Catholics in the churches, to say that they believe that Jesus Christ is really present, true God and true Man, under the sacramental species? How otherwise could an idolater, a heretic, behave?

See how open contradiction between belief and practice redounds to the contempt of our religion, to the dishonour of our faith, and serves as a pretext, even though a trivial and inexcusable pretext, to sectaries to continue obstinate in their unbelief! We attract heretics with one hand—that is—with the strength of our reasons, based on the authority of God; but we repel them with the other hand—that is, with the force of our bad example. Let us, then, endeavour to make our belief in this mystery shine visibly before men, and even thus wisely confute unbelief, by comporting ourselves in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist with that decency, modesty, and devotion that will manifest our faith to all.

And all the more should we do this in so much as the hidden presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is the greatest excess of the love of a God made man for us—*the greatest of the miracles of Christ*, as St. Thomas calls it, and as we shall see for ourselves in our next instruction, when we come to explain the loving ends for which Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST—(*continued*)

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

II.—THE EUCHARIST A TRUE SACRAMENT—ITS MATTER

7.—The Eucharist truly a sacrament.

HAVING explained the meaning of the word, it will be necessary now to show that the Eucharist is a true sacrament, and is one of the seven always recognized and venerated by the Church, as is clear from the fact that at the consecration of the chalice it is called "a mystery of faith." In addition to this, and omitting an almost innumerable host of testimonies from sacred writers who have always enumerated the Eucharist amongst the true sacraments, this teaching is justified by the very meaning and nature of a sacrament. It has outward and sensible signs; it signifies and produces grace; while as for its institution by Christ, neither the Evangelists nor the Apostle have left any room for doubt. Now, since all these notes combine to establish the truth of the Sacrament, there is clearly no need for further arguments.

8.—In what precisely the sacrament of the Eucharist consists.

The pastor will particularly observe that in this mystery there are various things to which sacred writers have occasionally given the name of sacrament. Sometimes its consecration was called a sacrament; sometimes its reception; frequently the body and blood of the Lord, which are contained in the Eucharist. For, as St. Augustine observes, this sacrament consists of two things—the visible species of the elements, and the invisible body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this sense that we say that this sacrament, that is the body and blood of the Lord, is to be adored. But it is clear that all these are called sacraments in a less strict sense—the species of bread and wine alone possess the true and proper import of the name.

9.—Difference between the Eucharist and the other sacraments.

It will be easy to see how the Eucharist differs from all the other sacraments. The other sacraments have their being only during the actual application of their matter—that is to say, only at the moment in which they are being administered to some one. Baptism, for instance, is a sacrament only while water is being actually employed to baptize a person ; but the Eucharist is constituted a perfect sacrament by the sole consecration of the matter, and it ceases not to be a true sacrament even though enclosed and preserved in the ciborium.

Moreover, in the other sacraments there is no change of the material elements into another substance. The water of Baptism, for instance, or the oil of Chrism, do not lose their former nature of water and oil by being administered as sacraments ; but in the Eucharist, that which previous to consecration was bread and wine, is, after consecration, truly the substance of the body and blood of the Lord.

10.—The Eucharist is one single sacrament.

Although there are two elements—bread and wine—that go to constitute the sacramental matter of the Eucharist, yet, guided by the teaching of the Church we profess that the Eucharist is only one sacrament, and not several ; otherwise we could no longer hold, with tradition and with the teaching of the Councils of the Lateran, of Florence, and of Trent, that there are seven sacraments, neither more nor less. Moreover, the object of the grace of this sacrament is to render us one mystic body ; and to be in keeping with its effect, the Eucharist should constitute but one sacrament—one, not because it may not be composed of more elements than one, but because it signifies only one thing. Just as food and drink, which are two different things, are employed only for one object—the sustenance of the body ; so also was it fitting that the two different species of the sacrament which were to signify the spiritual food by which the soul is nourished and sustained should be analogous to the two substances mentioned just now. Hence, the words of our Lord : *My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.*[1]

11.—The Eucharist signifies three things principally.

The pastor will also carefully explain what the sacrament of the Eucharist signifies, in order that on beholding the sacred mysteries with the eyes of their body, his flock may at the same time feed their souls by the contemplation of divine things.

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[1] John vi. 56.

Now, in this sacrament three things are signified :—

1. The first is the PASSION of Christ our Lord—a thing past. He Himself it is who taught us : *Do this for a commemoration of Me,*[1] and St. Paul bears witness: *As often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord, until He come.*[2]

2. The second is divine and heavenly GRACE—a thing present—which is bestowed on us in this sacrament to nourish and sustain the soul. Just as in Baptism we are begotten to newness of life, and in Confirmation are strengthened to resist Satan and openly profess the name of Christ ; so in the sacrament of the Eucharist are we nourished and sustained.

3. The third, which regards the future, is the reward of ETERNAL JOY AND GLORY, which, according to God's promise, we are to receive in our heavenly country.

These three things which clearly regard the past, present, and future, are so well signified by the holy mysteries of the Eucharist, that the sacrament, although consisting of different species, represents each one of the three as significantly as if the three were but one.

12.—The matter of the Eucharist is two-fold—bread and wine.

It is of the highest importance for the pastor to thoroughly understand the matter of the Eucharist, in order to be able both to consecrate it duly himself, and to instruct his flock as to its signification, and to enkindle in their hearts an ardent desire of possessing the treasure it denotes.

(*a*) Wheaten-bread.

The matter of the Eucharist is two-fold—the one on which we shall now speak being wheaten-bread ; the other shall be explained later on. Christ our Lord, as the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke testify, *took bread* into His hands, *blessed* it and *brake* it, saying : THIS IS MY BODY ;[3] and according to St. John, our Saviour called Himself bread : *I,* said He, *am the living bread come down from Heaven.*[4]

There are, however, different sorts of bread, because the material of which it is composed may be different ; thus it may be made of wheat, or of barley, or of pulse, or other products of the earth ; or because they possess different qualities, one being leavened, the other unleavened. As regards the former, the words of our Saviour make it clear that the matter of the

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[1] Luke xxii. 19.
[2] 1 Cor. xi. 26.
[3] Matt. xxvi. 26 ; Mark xiv. 22 ; Luke xxii. 19.
[4] John vi. 41.

Eucharist must be wheaten bread. In our ordinary conversation when we say bread we mean wheaten bread. This is also confirmed by a figure in the Old Testament. Our Lord commanded that the *loaves of proposition,* which prefigured this sacrament, should be made of *fine flour.*[1]

13.—As well as being wheaten, the bread should be unleavened.

But if none but wheaten bread can be regarded as the proper matter for this sacrament (conformable to the Apostolic tradition and to the defined teaching of the Church), it will readily be seen from the circumstances attending its institution by our Lord that the bread should also be unleavened. He consecrated and instituted the Eucharist on the first day of unleavened bread—a day during which it was not lawful for the Jews to have any leavened bread in their houses. Should the words of St. John the Evangelist, who relates that all this took place before the Pasch, be objected to, it will be easy to answer the objection. The feast of unleavened bread commenced on the evening of the fifth day (Thursday), and on that evening our Lord celebrated the Passover. Now, what the other Evangelists call the *first day of the unleavened bread,* is referred to by St. John as *the day before the Pasch,* because it was his object to note the *natural* day which did not commence till sunrise. Hence it is that St. John Chrysostom understands the *first day of the unleavened bread* to be that day on the evening of which the unleavened bread was to be eaten.

Moreover, the consecration of unleavened bread is in perfect keeping with that purity and innocence of heart with which the faithful should approach the reception of this sacrament, as may be gathered from the Apostle's words: *Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new mass, as you are unleavened; for Christ our Pasch is sacrificed. Therefore let us feast, not with the old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*[2]

14.—Unleavened bread not absolutely necessary.

This quality, however, is not to be considered so essential as to render the sacrament impossible by its absence—each kind possesses equally the real name and real nature of bread. Nevertheless it is lawful for no one on his own individual authority, or rather presumption, to alter the laudable rite of the Church of which he is a member. It is all the more unlawful in priests of the Latin Church, who have been commanded expressly by the Supreme Pontiffs to celebrate the sacred mysteries with unleavened bread alone.

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[1] Lev. xxiv. 5.

[2] 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

Enough has now been said with regard to the first matter of the Eucharist. It only remains to be observed that the particular quantity of bread that is to be used in consecration has never been determined, for this reason, that it depends upon the number of those who may or ought to receive the sacred mysteries—a number that cannot be definitely defined.

15.—(*b*) The second matter of the Eucharist is wine of the grape.

We now come to the second matter of the Eucharist, which is wine pressed from the grape and mixed with a little water. The Catholic Church has always taught that our Saviour made use of wine in the institution of this sacrament, and He Himself said: *I will not drink from henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day.*[1] Regarding these words, St. John Chrysostom observes: "He says *of the fruit of the vine*, which certainly produced wine not water;" as if he intended to crush, even so far in advance, the heresy of those who asserted that water alone should be used in these mysteries.

16.—Mixed with water.

It has always, however, been the usage in the Church to mingle water with the wine. First, because the authority of the Councils and the testimony of St. Cyprian show us that our Lord Himself did so; and secondly, because by this admixture is renewed the memory of the blood and water which issued from His side. Moreover, the word water, as we see in the Apocalypse,[2] signifies the people; and hence water mixed with wine signifies the union of the faithful with Christ their Head. For the rest, this rite is based on Apostolic tradition and has always been observed by the Catholic Church.

17.—But only a little water.

But although there are grave reasons for mixing water with the wine, so grave indeed that it cannot be omitted without mortal sin; yet even if it actually is omitted, the sacrament would none the less exist. But care must be taken to observe that though water must be mixed with the wine in the sacred mysteries, only a small quantity is to be used, since in the opinion of sacred writers that water is changed into wine. Hence it is that Pope Honorius wrote: " A pernicious abuse has been introduced amongst you —that of using more water than wine in the holy Sacrifice; whereas in accordance with the very reasonable practice of the universal Church, far more wine than water should be used."

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[1] Matt. xxvi. 29.

[2] xvii. 15.

These, then, are the two and only two elements of this sacrament; and rightly has it been forbidden by many decrees of the Church to offer anything else but bread and wine, as some dared to do.

18.—Peculiar fitness of these two elements. Let us now see how well adapted are these two symbols of bread and wine to represent the nature and effects of which we believe and profess they are the sensible signs:—

(*a*) And first, they signify Jesus Christ, as our true life; for He Himself has said: *My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.*[1] As, then, the body of Christ our Lord furnishes the food of eternal life to those who receive it with purity and holiness, rightly is this sacrament composed precisely of those elements which serve to sustain our present life; thus giving the faithful to understand that the soul and the heart are nourished by the Communion of the precious body and blood of Christ.

(*b*) Secondly, these two elements also serve to some extent to prove the truth of the real presence of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Seeing, as we do, that bread and wine are every day changed by the power of nature into human flesh and blood, we are all the more easily led by this analogy to believe that the substance of bread and wine is changed by the words of consecration into the true flesh and blood of our Lord.

(*c*) This miraculous change of the elements also serves to shadow forth what takes place in the soul. Just as the substance of bread and wine is really changed into the body and blood of Christ without presenting any visible indication of that change, so when we receive the true life in the sacrament of the Eucharist we are interiorly renewed to life, even though nothing seems outwardly changed in us.

(*d*) Finally, the Church being one body yet composed of many members, nothing could more perfectly represent their union than the elements of bread and wine. Bread is made from many grains, and wine is pressed from many grapes; and thus do they declare that we, too, many as we are, are closely united by the bond of this divine mystery and made as it were one body.

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[1] John vi. 56.

III.—THE FORM OF THE EUCHARIST

19.—The form to be used in the consecration of the bread.

We now come to explain the form to be used in the consecration of the bread, not indeed that this point need be explained to the people except in some special cases (for this knowledge is not necessary to those not in Holy Orders), but to guard against the possibility of priests making grievous mistakes in the consecration of this sacrament through ignorance of the proper form.

Now we learn from the holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and also from the Apostle, that the form is: *This is My body.* For it is written: *Whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and brake, and gave to His disciples, and said: Take and eat, This is My Body.*[1]

This form thus used by Christ our Lord Himself has been perpetually observed by the Catholic Church. The almost infinite testimonies of the holy Fathers and the well-known and easy accessible decree of the Council of Florence may be here omitted, especially as the fact may be established from the words of our Saviour: *Do this for a commemoration of Me.* For the command given by our Lord refers not only to what He did, but also to what He said; and especially must it be referred to the words which He had uttered not only to signify, but also to accomplish.

The same truth is easily proved from reason. The form of a sacrament consists in the words which signify the effect produced by that sacrament. Now the words in question signify and declare the effect that is produced in the Eucharist—that is to say, the conversion of the bread into the true body of our Lord—and consequently it follows that those words constitute the form. The words *He blessed,* recorded by the Evangelist, may be understood in this sense. They seem to be equivalent to saying: "Taking bread, He blessed it, saying: This is My body."

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[1] Matt. xxvi. 26; Mark xiv. 22; Luke xxii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24

20.—Not all the words used in the consecration are necessary.

It is true that the Evangelist places the words *take and eat* before the words, *this is My body,* but it is evident that they refer to the use and not to the consecration of the matter. They must, indeed, be pronounced by the priest, just as the conjunction *for* must be also pronounced, in the consecration of the body and blood, but they are not essential to the validity of the sacrament ; otherwise it would follow that were there no one to receive the sacrament it should not, or even could not, be consecrated. And yet it is incontestable that the priest on pronouncing the words of our Lord, according to the institution and practice of the Church, truly consecrates the proper matter—bread—even though it should afterwards happen to be administered to no one.

21.—The form to be used in the consecration of the wine.

With regard to the consecration of the wine, which is the other element of this sacrament, it is necessary, for the reasons already assigned, that the priest should thoroughly know its form. Now, it is firmly to be believed that the form consists in the words : "THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL TESTAMENT, THE MYSTERY OF FAITH, WHICH SHALL BE SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY TO THE REMISSION OF SINS." Of these words, the greater part are taken from holy Scripture, while the others have been preserved in the Church by Apostolic tradition. The words, *This is the chalice,*[1] are taken from St. Luke and from the Apostle ;[2] the words that come next : *Of My blood,* or *My blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for you and for many to the remission of sins,* are taken partly from St. Luke and partly from St. Matthew ;[3] while as regards the words *eternal,* and *mystery of faith,* they have been handed down to us by tradition, the interpreter and guardian of the Catholic faith.

22.—This is the true form.

Concerning the truth of this form there can be no doubt, if what has been already said regarding the form of the consecration of the bread is borne in mind. It is certain that the form consists in those words which signify the change of the substance of the wine into the blood of the Lord. Now the words in question clearly indicate this change ; and hence it is evident that they, and they alone, constitute the proper form. Moreover, these words also denote certain admirable effects of the blood of Christ which was poured forth in the passion, and which pertain in a special way to this sacrament. The first is admission to the eternal inheritance which has been given to us by right of the *New and Eternal Testament*; the second is admission to justice by *the mystery of faith*, for God hath established Jesus to be a propitiation *through faith in His blood, that He Himself may be just and the justifier of him who is of the faith of Jesus Christ.*[1] The third effect is *the remission of sins.*[2]

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[1] Luke xxii. 20.
[2] 1 Cor. xi. 25.
[3] Luke xxii. 20. ; Matt. xxvi. 28.

23.—Explanation of the form of consecration of the wine.

Now, as these words of consecration are replete with mysteries, and as they are perfectly appropriate to the object they express, we must examine them carefully. The words, *This is the chalice of My blood*, signify: "This is My blood which is contained in this chalice." Well and rightly is mention made of the chalice at the moment of consecration; for the blood is the drink of the faithful, and this would not be sufficiently signified if it were not contained in some drinking vessel. Next come the words: *Of the New Testament*, which are added to show us that the blood of Jesus Christ is not now given merely as a figure, as was the case in the Old Law (of which St. Paul remarks, in the Epistle to the Hebrews,[3] that without blood a Testament is not dedicated); but is given really and truly as becomes the character of the New Testament. Hence St. Paul says: *Christ therefore is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of His death they who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*[4] As for the word *eternal*, it refers to the eternal inheritance which has become ours by the death of Christ the Lord, our eternal Testator.

The addition: *mystery of faith*, does not exclude the reality, but signifies that what is hidden and infinitely above the power of the mortal eye is to be believed with firm faith. The meaning here attached to these words is quite different from that which they have when applied to Baptism. The fact that it is by faith that we see the blood of Christ veiled under the appearances of wine is called a *mystery of faith*; while Baptism is rightly called a "sacrament of faith" by us, and a "mystery of faith" by the Greeks, because it embraces an entire profession of Christian faith.

Another reason why we call the blood of Christ a *mystery of faith* is because the mind of man experiences the utmost difficulty and trouble in the fact that faith proposes for our belief that the true Son of God, Christ our Lord, Himself true God and true Man, suffered death for us—a death which is precisely signified by the sacrament of His blood. Hence the passion of the Lord is more appropriately commemorated here by the words: *which shall be shed for the remission of sins*, rather than at the consecration of His body. For the blood, by being separately consecrated, possesses much more force and vividness in putting before our eyes the passion of our Lord, His death, and the nature of His sufferings.

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[1] Rom. iii. 25. [2] Heb. ix. 22. [3] ix. 18. [4] Heb. ix. 15.

The additional words: *For you and for many*, are taken, some from St. Matthew, the others from St. Luke, and have been combined by the Church under the inspiration of God. They serve to express the fruits and the advantages of the passion. If in fact we consider the value of the passion, we must acknowledge that the blood of the Saviour was shed for the salvation of all mankind; but if we regard the fruits derived from it we see at once that they do not extend to all, but to many. In saying, then, *For you*, He signified thereby either those who were present or those chosen from among the Jewish people, such, for instance, as the disciples (apart from Judas) to whom He was speaking. In adding *For many*, He wished to include the rest of the elect, whether among the Jews or the Gentiles. Rightly, therefore, were the words *For all* left unsaid, because He here speaks of the fruit of His passion alone which brought the fruit of salvation to none but the elect. The words of the Apostle: *Jesus Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many*,[1] point to this fact; as do the words of our Lord recorded by St. John: *I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me, because they are Thine.*[2]

There are many other mysteries in these words of consecration; but pastors by frequent meditation and study of divine things will, with the assistance of God, easily discover them of themselves.

IV.—THE REAL PRESENCE

24.—The Eucharist to be judged by faith, not by the senses.

We must now resume the explanation of those truths concerning which the faithful must on no account be left in ignorance.

And as the Apostle lays it down that an enormous crime is committed by those who *do not discern the body of the Lord*,[1] the pastor will first of all teach the faithful that their mind and understanding must be detached as far as possible from the dominion of the senses; for were they to persuade themselves that in the sacrament of the Eucharist is contained nothing but what the senses disclose, they would at once be guilty of the enormous impiety of believing that this sacrament contains nothing but bread and wine, since sight, touch, taste, and smell reveal the appearances of bread and wine, and nothing more. Their minds, therefore, must, as far as possible, be withdrawn from the influence of the senses and raised to the contemplation of the infinite virtue and power of God.

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[1] Heb. ix. 28.

[2] John xvii. 9.

25.—The words of consecration accomplish three things.

The Catholic faith unhesitatingly believes and teaches that in this sacrament three stupendous effects are accomplished by the words of consecration:—

(*a*) The first is, that the true body and blood of Christ our Lord—the self-same body that was born of the Virgin and that now sits at the right hand of the Father—is contained in the Eucharist;

(*b*) The second, repugnant and contradictory though it may seem to the evidence of the senses, is that none of the substance of the elements remains in the sacrament;

(*c*) And the third, which is easily inferred from the other two, and which is also positively expressed by the words of consecration, is that the accidents which appear to the eyes or present themselves to the other senses, exist in a wonderful and ineffable manner without a subject. We still see the accidents of bread and wine; but they inhere in no substance, and exist independently of any; while as for the substance of bread and wine it is so changed into the very body and blood of Jesus Christ as to cease absolutely to be any longer the substance of bread and wine.

26.—Scripture proof of the real presence—our Lord's own words.

Beginning with the first of these three effects, the pastor will endeavour to show how clear and explicit are the words of our Saviour establishing the real presence of His body in the Eucharist. And in fact when He says: *This is My body: This is My blood*, no one in his senses can mistake the meaning of the words, especially as they regard His human nature, the reality of which Catholic faith forbids us to call into doubt. As the learned and holy St. Hilary, speaking of the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, admirably remarks "since our Lord Jesus Christ expressly declared that His flesh is truly food, and since our faith teaches the same truth, it is impossible to entertain the slightest doubt on the matter."

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[1] I Cor. xi. 29.

27.—Another passage of sacred Scripture.

The pastor will also adduce another passage in which it is clearly seen that the body and blood of our Lord are really contained in the Eucharist. After having recorded the consecration of bread and wine by our Lord, and the distribution of the sacred mysteries to the Apostles, the Apostle adds: *But let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.*[1] Now if, as the heretics untiringly assert, there is nothing presented for our veneration in this sacrament but a memorial and sign of the passion of Christ, why did the Apostle make use of so strong an expression to exhort the faithful to prove themselves? By that terrible word *judgment,* the Apostle declared that an abominable crime is committed by him who unworthily receives and does not distinguish from other kinds of food the body and blood concealed under the Eucharistic species—a doctrine he had already more fully developed in the preceding chapter of the same Epistle wherein he said: *The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? and the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?*[2]—words which clearly signify the real presence of the body and blood of Christ.

28.—The teaching of the Church—the doctrine of the Fathers.

These passages of Scripture are, then, to be expounded by the pastor, and he will be careful to show his flock that their meaning is in no way doubtful nor uncertain, especially in view of the fact that the Church of God has interpreted them by her infallible authority. This may be ascertained readily in two ways.

(*a*) The first is by consulting the Fathers who flourished in the early ages of the Church, and in each succeeding century, and who are the most trustworthy witnesses of her doctrine. Now all these unanimously and unmistakably teach the truth of this dogma. It would be an endless task to quote the words of each one—it will be sufficient to cite or rather indicate a few, from whose words we may learn the teaching of the many.

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 28, 29.

[2] 1 Cor. x. 16.

First of all, then, let St. Ambrose profess his faith. In his book on "The Initiated," he declares that in this sacrament is received the very body of Christ, just as it was derived from the Virgin, and that this is a truth to be held with firm faith. In another place he teaches that previous to consecration there is only bread, but after consecration there is the flesh of Christ.

Let our second witness, and one not less important and worthy of faith, be St. John Chrysostom. He professes and teaches the self-same truth in a multitude of passages, but especially in his sixtieth homily on "Those who receive the sacred mysteries unworthily;" and also in his forty-fourth and forty-sixth homilies on St. John: "Let us," he says, "obey God, not contradict Him, even though what He says seems to be opposed to our reason and our senses—His word is infallible, while our senses are easily deceived."

With this doctrine, the teaching of St. Augustine—that zealous defender of Catholic faith—is in complete harmony, especially in his explanation of the thirty-third Psalm, where he writes: "It is impossible to man to carry himself in his own hands—that is peculiar to Christ alone; for in His own hands was He carried, when distributing His own body He said: *This is My body.*"

As well as St. Justin and St. Irenæus, St. Cyril in his fourth book on St. John affirms so clearly that the true body of our Lord is contained in this sacrament, that his words can be twisted or obscured by no false or captious interpretation.

Should the pastor desire additional testimonies of the holy Fathers, it will be easy to cite St. Denis, St. Hilary, St. Jerome, St. John Damascene, and countless others whose weighty opinions on this subject have been collected and may be read in the easily accessible works of pious and learned men.

29.—In the condemnation of errors.

(*b*) The second means of ascertaining the teaching of the Church on matters of faith is the condemnation of contrary doctrines and opinions. Now it is quite certain that belief in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist was always spread throughout the universal Church, and unanimously received by all the faithful, so much so that when Berengarius five hundred years ago * dared to deny it, and asserted that it was nothing more than a sign, he was unanimously condemned in the Council of Vercelli, which was immediately convoked by Leo IX, and was led to anathematize his heresy. And when, later on, he relapsed into his impious error, he was condemned anew by three different Councils—one at Tours, and the two others at Rome, which latter were convoked by Nicholas II and Gregory VIII. Innocent III confirmed these decisions later on in the general Council of the Lateran. Finally, the Councils of Florence and Trent fixed and defined this dogma with still greater precision.

If, then, the pastor will carefully set forth all these authorities, he will be able, while ignoring those who, blinded by error, hate nothing so much as the light of truth, to strengthen the weak and fill the souls of the pious with consolation and joy; and all the more so as the faithful cannot doubt that this dogma is to be numbered amongst the articles of faith. They in fact who believe and profess that God is Almighty, must also believe that in Him the power is not wanting to accomplish the great work which we admire and adore in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Finally, they who believe in the holy Catholic Church must of necessity recognize that the doctrine is that which we have set forth.

30.—The dignity of the Church manifested in this sacrament.

Now, there is nothing that can contribute so much to the joy and advantage of pious souls as the contemplation of the sublime dignity of this sacrament. By it they learn, first of all, how great must be the perfection of the Law of the Gospel which possesses in reality that which was shadowed forth under the Mosaic Law in signs and figures only. Hence, it has been well said by St. Denis that our Church is midway between the synagogue and the heavenly Jerusalem, and participates of the nature of the one and the other. The faithful, then, can never sufficiently admire the perfection, the glory, and the greatness of holy Church, which is but one degree removed from the bliss of heaven. For in common with the inhabitants of heaven we, too, as well as they, possess Christ, God and Man, in our midst. In one degree we are indeed below them, and it consists in this, that they enjoy the presence of Christ in Beatific Vision; while we do indeed, with firm and unwavering faith, adore His presence— but it is a presence invisible to our eyes and concealed under the miraculous veil of the sacred mysteries.

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* That is, in the eleventh century.

Finally, the faithful experience in this sacrament a proof of the perfect love of Christ our Saviour towards us. Well did it becomes His goodness not to withdraw from our midst that nature which He assumed for our sake, but as far as possible to desire to dwell amongst us, so as to verify unceasingly and truthfully the words: *My delight is to be with the children of Men.*[1]

V.—CHRIST IS WHOLE AND ENTIRE IN THE EUCHARIST

31.—Jesus Christ whole and entire in the Eucharist.

Here the pastor will explain to the faithful that in this sacrament are contained not only the true body of Jesus Christ, along with all that goes to constitute a true body, such, for instance as bones and nerves, but also Christ whole and entire. He must point out that Christ is the name of a God and of a man, that is to say, of one Person in whom are united the divine and human natures; and hence that He possesses both substances, as well as all that each substance involves—the Divinity and the Humanity whole and entire, consisting of soul and body and blood—all of which we must believe to be contained in the sacrament. For since in heaven the whole Humanity is united to the Divinity in one Person or Hypostasis, it would be impious to suppose that the body which is present in the Eucharist is separated from the same Divinity.

32.—Not all things, however, are in the Eucharist in the same manner.

The pastor, however, will take care to observe that not all things are contained in this sacrament in the same manner nor by the same virtue. For there are some things which we say are present in virtue of, and by force of, consecration. The words of consecration effect what they signify, and hence sacred writers say that in the sacrament, and by virtue of the sacrament, is present that which is expressed by the words of the form. Hence it is their opinion that were it possible that one thing could be detached from all the rest, there would be contained in the sacrament only that, and that alone, which the form signifies.

On the other hand, there are some things contained in this sacrament precisely because they are inseparably united to those things which are expressed in the form. Thus, as the form, *This is My body* used to consecrate the bread, denotes the body of our Lord, it is precisely the body of the Lord that is contained in the Eucharist, by virtue of the sacrament. But as the blood, soul, and Divinity are inseparable from the body, they, too, will be present in the sacrament, not indeed by virtue of consecration but because they are inseparably united to the body—which mode of presence in the sacrament is called *concomitance.* Clearly, then, Jesus Christ is whole and entire in the sacrament—when two things are really united, where one is the other must be also. Hence it follows that Jesus Christ, whole and entire, is contained under the species of bread and of wine to such an extent, that as under the species of bread are contained not only the body but also the blood—nay, Jesus Christ whole and entire—so also under the species of wine are contained not only the blood, but also the body, and Christ whole and entire.

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[1] Prov. viii. 31.

33.—Reason for two separate consecrations.

Now, although the faithful must be absolutely certain and convinced that this is the case, wisely has it been ordained that two separate consecrations should take place—first of all, the better to represent the passion of our Lord, in which His blood was separated from His body—and hence it is that in the consecration we make mention of the effusion of His blood; and secondly, because as this sacrament is to be used by us for the nourishment of our souls, it was highly fitting that it should be instituted under the form of food and drink—two things which clearly constitute the complete sustenance of man.

34.—Christ is whole and entire in each particle.

Nor is it to be forgotten that not only is Jesus Christ whole and entire in each species, but in each particle of each species. St. Augustine thus writes: "Each one receives our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is whole and entire in the portion received by each—He is not diminished by being received by each, but gives Himself whole and entire to each?" The same truth is also easily inferred from the Evangelists. It must not, however, be imagined that each piece of bread was consecrated by our Lord with a separate form, but that all the bread then used in the sacred mystery was consecrated in one form, and in a quantity sufficient to be distributed to all the Apostles. This clearly happened in the case of the chalice, since He Himself said: *Take, and divide it among you.*[1]

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[1] Luke xxii. 17.

All that has been thus far said is intended to enable the pastor to show that the true body and true blood of Christ are contained in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

VI.—TRANSUBSTANTIATION

35.—After the consecration the substance of neither bread nor wine remains.

The pastor will now turn to the second point to be explained, and will show that after consecration the substance of the bread and wine no longer exists in the sacrament. And extraordinary though this may seem, yet it is only a necessary consequence of what we have already demonstrated.

If, in fact, after consecration, the body of Jesus Christ is really present under the appearance of bread and wine, and since it was not there before, it must of necessity have become present either by change of place, or by creation, or by the conversion of some other thing into it. Now, it is altogether impossible that the body of Christ is present in the Eucharist through a mere change of place; for if that were so, He should cease to be in heaven, since a body cannot move without leaving the place from which it moves. It is even less credible that the body of Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist through creation—nay, the very idea is inconceivable. It remains, therefore, for our Lord's body to be present in the Eucharist, by the bread being changed into His body; and hence the substance of bread necessarily ceases to exist.

36.—Transubstantiation approved by the Councils and founded on Scripture.

Hence the Fathers of the general Councils of the Lateran and of Florence confirmed the truth of this doctrine by solemn decrees, while it was still more fully defined by the Council of Trent in these words: "If anyone shall say that in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of the bread and wine remains along with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."

This doctrine is easily inferred from the words of sacred Scripture: Thus our Lord in instituting this sacrament, said: *This is My body.* Now the word *this* denotes the entire substance of the thing present; and hence if the substance of the bread still remained, our Lord could not truly say: *This is My* *body.* Next, our Lord says, in St. John: *The bread which I will give is My flesh for the life of the world* [1]—thus calling His flesh bread. A little further on He adds: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you;* [2] and also: *My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.* [3] Now, when in terms thus clear and distinct, He calls His flesh bread, and *meat indeed,* and His blood *drink indeed,* it is quite evident that none of the substance of the bread and wine remains any longer in the sacrament.

37.—And confirmed by the testimony of the Fathers.

Whoever turns over the pages of the Fathers, will at once recognize that such was ever their unanimous teaching. St. Ambrose, for instance, thus writes: "You will say, perhaps, 'This bread is simply ordinary bread'; true it is that it is ordinary bread previous to consecration; but let consecration once take place, and that bread becomes the flesh of Christ." To illustrate this more fully, he brings forward various comparisons and explanations. In another passage, in his explanation of the Psalmist's words: *Whatsoever the Lord pleased He hath done, in heaven and on earth,* [4] he says: "Although we see the species of bread and wine, yet faith tells us that after consecration it is nothing else than the flesh and blood of Christ."

St. Hilary makes use of almost the same words to express the same truth, and teaches that the body and blood of the Lord are really in the Eucharist, even though externally it appears to be bread and wine.

38.—The Eucharist sometimes called bread after the consecration.

Here the pastor will do well to warn the faithful that they are not to be surprised if, even after consecration, the Eucharist is sometimes called bread. The reason is, first, that the Eucharist still preserves the appearances of bread, and secondly because it retains the natural quality of bread, which is to nourish and sustain the body. Moreover, it is the practice of sacred Scripture to name things as they appear to be, as may clearly be seen in Genesis, [5] where it is said that three men appeared to Abraham, while in reality they were three angels. In like manner, the two angels who appeared to the Apostles after the ascension of our Lord into heaven are called men, not angels. [6]

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[1] John vi. 52. [2] John vi. 54. [3] John vi. 56. [4] Ps. cxxxiv. 6. [5] Gen. xviii. 2. [6] Acts i. 10.

VII.—THE MANNER OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

39.—The substance of the bread and wine is converted into the substance of the body and blood of the Lord.

It is, indeed, very difficult to give a perfect exposition of this mystery. The pastor will, however, endeavour to explain to those who are more advanced in the knowledge of divine things the manner of this wonderful change. (As for those who are yet weak in faith, they might possibly be overwhelmed by the sublimity of this doctrine.) This change, then, is such that by the power of God the entire substance of bread is changed into the entire substance of the body of Christ, and the entire substance of the wine into the entire substance of His blood, and this without the slightest change in our Lord Himself—He is neither begotten, nor changed, nor increased, but remains whole and entire in His substance. Explaining this mystery, St. Ambrose says: " You see how powerful are the words of Christ. Now, if His word is so powerful as to be able to call into existence what did not previously exist, namely, the world, how much more efficacious is His word to give a new being to what already exists, and change it into another thing? "

Many other ancient and authoritative Fathers have written to the same effect. Thus St. Augustine says: " We unhesitatingly confess that before consecration they are bread and wine just as nature made them; but after consecration they are the body and blood of Christ which the words of consecration have rendered present." And St. John Damascene writes: " The body is truly united to the Divinity—that body which was born of the Virgin; not that the body thus derived descends from heaven, but because bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ."

40.—This change is properly called Transubstantiation

This admirable change, as the Council of Trent taught, is aptly and rightly called Transubstantiation by the Catholic Church. Just as natural changes are rightly called transformations, because of the fact that they involve a change of form; so in like manner the word transubstantiation was rightly and wisely introduced by our predecessors in the faith to express the fact that in the Eucharist the whole substance of one thing passes into the whole substance of another thing.

41.—This mystery should not be over curiously inquired into.

In accordance with the repeated admonition of the holy Fathers, the faithful should be cautioned not to search too curiously into the manner in which this change is effected. It is beyond our comprehension and we find no similiar example in natural changes, nor even in the very work of creation. Faith tells us that it is so; but as to the manner in which it takes place we must not be over curious.

The pastor should be no less cautious in explaining how the body of Christ is contained whole and entire under the very smallest particle of bread—indeed, discussions of this kind need seldom be entered upon. But should Christian charity demand it, the pastor will remember first of all to fortify the minds of the faithful by the words of the Gospel: *No word shall be impossible to God.*[1]

42.—The body of our Lord is not present as in a place.

In the next place, he will show that Christ our Lord is not present in this sacrament as in a place. Place relates to things only in so far as they have magnitude. Now, when we say that Christ our Lord is present in this sacrament, we do not assert that this has any reference to whether He is great or small—terms which concern quantity—but simply in His substance. For the substance of bread is changed into the substance of Christ—not into magnitude or quantity; while substance, as must be acknowledged by all, is contained just as much in a small as in a large space. For instance, the substance of air and its entire nature is necessarily as much in a small as in a large quantity of air, and in the same way the whole nature of water is no less entire in a tiny glass than in a great river. Since, then, the body of our Lord succeeds the substance of bread, we must acknowledge that it is present in the sacrament after the same manner as the substance of the bread was before consecration—whether in a greater or lesser quantity is a matter of perfect indifference.

VIII.—THE ACCIDENTS OF THE BREAD AND WINE

43.—The accidents remain without a subject.

We now come to the third great and wonderful effect of this sacrament—an effect, however, the explanation of which is much facilitated by what has been already said regarding the two other effects—and it is that the species of bread and wine exist in this sacrament without a subject. As we have already shown, the body and blood of our Lord are truly contained in this sacrament, to the entire exclusion of the substance of the bread and wine, and as the accidents of the bread and wine cannot inhere in the body and blood of Christ, they must, therefore, contrary to the laws of nature, necessarily subsist of themselves, inhering in no subject. This has been the uniform and constant teaching of the Catholic Church, and it is easily established by the testimony of the same witnesses who have been already brought forward to demonstrate that in the Eucharist there remains nothing of the substance of the bread and wine.

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[1] Luke i. 37.

44.—The Eucharist—why instituted under the appearances of bread and wine.

Nothing becomes the piety of the faithful more than to set aside curious questions, venerate and adore the majesty of this sacrament, and admire the bountiful providence of God in establishing these sacred mysteries under the appearances of bread and wine. To eat human flesh or drink human blood is abhorrent to human nature, and hence God in His wisdom ordained that His most holy body and blood should be administered under the appearances of bread and wine, which are our daily and common food, and which are especially agreeable to us.

To this we may add two other advantages—first, we are freed from the calumnious accusations of unbelievers, which could not be so easily answered if we were seen to eat the Lord under His visible form ; and secondly, because in receiving the body and blood of the Lord in a manner imperceptible to the senses, we possess a powerful means of increasing our faith. For faith, as St. Gregory says, " has no merit where reason furnishes proof."

All that we have said, however, should be laid before the faithful only with extreme prudence, and with due regard to their capacity, and to the particular circumstances of the time.

IX.—THE EFFECTS OF THE EUCHARIST

45.—The salutary effects of the Eucharist should be also explained.

With regard to the admirable virtue and fruits of the Eucharist, there is no class of persons to whom a knowledge of them is not useful, none to whom it is not even highly necessary. All that has been already said at such great length on the Eucharist has been set forth for the particular purpose of making the faithful sensible of the advantages of this sacrament. But as all its immense advantages and its fruits cannot be adequately expressed in words, the pastor will select one or two points in order to show the abundance and profusion of graces contained in these sacred mysteries.

46.—The Eucharist is the source of all the sacraments

He will to a certain extent accomplish this object if, having first explained the nature and efficacy of the other sacraments, he will then compare the Eucharist to a fountain, the other sacraments to rivulets. Truly is it called the source of all graces, for it contains, and in an admirable manner, the Source of all gifts and graces, the Author of all the sacraments—Christ our Lord, from whom as from their source they derive all the goodness and perfection they possess. From this comparison, therefore, it will not be difficult to infer the wonderful treasures of divine grace which are bestowed on us in this sacrament.

47.—It confers on the soul the same benefits as are conferred on the body by bread and wine.

It will be also useful to consider the nature of bread and wine, which are symbols of the Eucharist. What bread and wine are to the body, the Eucharist is, in a higher and more perfect way, to the health and happiness of the soul. The sacrament is not, indeed, like bread and wine, changed into our substance, but we ourselves are, in a certain sense, changed into its nature, so that the words of St. Augustine may be very well applied here: "I am the food of the grown; grow and thou shalt have part in this food; thou shalt not change Me into thee, as thou dost to the food of thy body—but thou shalt be changed into Me."

48.—Gives Grace.

If, then, *grace and truth come by Jesus Christ,* they surely must be poured into that soul which worthily and holily receives Him who says of Himself: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him.*[1] It cannot be doubted that those who receive this sacrament with sentiments of faith and piety receive the Son of God into their souls, in such a way as to be united, like living members, to His body. For it is written: *He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me;*[2] as also: *The bread which I will give is My*

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[1] John vi. 57.

[2] John vi. 58.

flesh for the life of the world.[1] Interpreting this passage, St. Cyril says: "The Word of God, uniting Himself to His own flesh, rendered it vivifying. It became Him, therefore, to unite Himself to our bodies in a wonderful manner through His sacred flesh and precious blood, which in virtue of His vivifying benediction we receive in the bread and wine."

49.—A state of grace necessary to receive worthily.

But in saying that grace is given in the Eucharist let the pastor take care to point out that this does not mean that to receive this sacrament worthily, it is not necessary to be already in the state of grace. Natural food is of no use to the dead—in like manner, the sacred mysteries are of no avail to that soul which does not live by the spirit. Hence it is that they have been instituted under the appearances of bread and wine to show that their object is not to restore life to the soul, but to preserve the life that already exists in the soul.

That grace is bestowed in the Eucharist is, then, to be taken in the sense that even *first* grace, which all should have before they presume to touch the Holy Eucharist with their lips (lest *they eat and drink judgment to themselves*), is given to those only who have the desire and resolution to receive this sacrament. which is the end of all the sacraments, the symbol of the unity and brotherhood of the members of the Church, outside of which none can obtain grace.

50.—Increases the life of the soul.

Moreover, the body is not only supported but also increased by natural food, and from it the taste derives new relish and pleasure every day; so in like manner the Eucharistic food not only sustains the life of the soul, but fortifies it, and enables it to be more and more delighted with divine things. Rightly, then, do we say that grace is given in this sacrament, which is well compared to the manna, *having in it the sweetness of every taste.*[2]

51.—Remits venial sins.

It cannot be questioned that lighter offences, known as venial sins, are remitted and pardoned by the Eucharist. All that the soul may have lost through the fire of passion, by the commission of slight offences—all this the Eucharist repairs by cancelling these lesser faults, in the same way as (to keep to the comparison already made) we experience that the daily waste and loss, which is caused by the vital heat within us, is gradually restored and repaired by natural food. Justly, therefore, has it been said of this heavenly sacrament, by St. Ambrose: "This daily bread is taken as a remedy for daily infirmities." This, however, is to be understood of those sins only by which the soul is not deeply seared.

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[1] John vi. 52.

[2] Wisd. xvi. 20.

52.—Bestows strength against temptations, and concupiscence.

Another effect of the sacred mysteries is to preserve us pure, undefiled, and safe from the assaults of temptation, and, like a heavenly antidote, to secure the soul against being infected and corrupted by the insidious virulence of deadly disease. Hence it was, as St. Cyprian records, that when of old the faithful were being hurried in multitudes to torments and death for the name of Jesus Christ, it was the received custom of the Catholic Church for the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord to be administered to them by the bishops, to guard them from the danger of being overcome by the violence of their torments, and so yielding in the saving combat. Furthermore it represses and subdues the lust of the flesh—in proportion as it inflames the soul with the fire of charity it must of necessity extinguish the ardour of concupiscence.

53. — Facilitates the attainment of eternal glory.

Finally, to comprise in a few words all the advantages and blessings of this sacrament, it will be enough to say that in the Blessed Eucharist there exists a sovereign help towards the attainment of eternal glory. It is written: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*[1] By the grace imparted by the Eucharist the faithful, even in this life, enjoy deep peace and tranquillity of soul; and when the time comes to leave this mortal life, like Elias who, *in the strength of the hearth-cake,*[2] walked to Horeb, the Mount of God, those who have been invigorated by this sacrament will ascend to eternal bliss and glory.

It will be easy for the pastor to explain all this at greater length by dwelling on the sixth chapter of St. John, in which the manifold effects of the Eucharist are indicated; or if surveying the admirable actions of our Lord, he shall show that if we justly and deservedly account those happy beyond measure who received Him beneath their roof during His mortal life, or who were restored to health by *touching His garment*,[1] or even the *hem of His garment*, how much more happy we into whose souls He, now that He is in possession of immortal glory, does not disdain to enter to heal all our wounds, and share with us that glory which is replete with every good and perfect gift.

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[1] John vi. 55.

[2] 3 Kings xix. 6.

X.—THE MANNER OF RECEIVING THE EUCHARIST IS THREEFOLD

54.—Three classes of communicants.

To excite the faithful to be *zealous for better gifts*,[2] it is now necessary to indicate who they are by whom the abundant fruits of the Eucharist, which have been already enumerated, are obtained, and to show that there is more than one way of communicating. Rightly, then, did our predecessors, as we read in the Council of Trent, distinguish three ways of receiving the Blessed Eucharist.

(*a*) Some there are who receive it only sacramentally; such are those sinners who fear not to receive the holy mysteries with polluted lips and hearts, and who, as the Apostle says, eat and drink the body of the Lord unworthily.[3] Of these St. Augustine writes. "He who does not dwell in Christ, and in whom Christ does not dwell, certainly does not eat His flesh spiritually, even though carnally and visibly he presses the body and blood of the Lord under his teeth." Not only, then, do they who receive the holy mysteries with such dispositions obtain no fruit thereby, but even, as the Apostle witnesses, *they eat and drink judgment to themselves*.[4]

(*b*) Others there are who are said to receive the Blessed Eucharist only spiritually, and they are those who, animated with that lively *faith which worketh by charity*,[5] partake of this heavenly bread in wish and desire; and if they do not receive all the fruits of the sacrament, they certainly receive a very considerable part thereof.

(*c*) Finally, there are those who receive the Blessed Eucharist both sacramentally and spiritually. Faithful to the Apostle's teaching they first prove themselves, put on the nuptial robe, and then approach this divine banquet, thus deriving from the Eucharist all the copious blessings which we have enumerated above.

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[1] Matt. ix. 20. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 31. [3] 1 Cor. xi. 29. [4] 1 Cor. xi. 29. [5] Gal. v. 6.

It is clear, then, that those who have it in their power to prepare for and receive the sacrament of the body of the Lord, and who content themselves with making only a spiritual Communion, voluntarily deprive themselves of the choicest heavenly graces.

XI.—DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY FOR COMMUNION

55.—Preparation necessary before Communion.

It should here be shown how the faithful should be prepared before approaching to receive the Blessed Eucharist sacramentally. And to make clear the strict necessity of this preparation, it will be useful first of all to propose our Saviour's example. Before giving His Apostles the sacrament of His precious body and blood, though they were already clean, He washed their feet to show us that we must take great care to neglect nothing that pertains to the purity and innocence of our souls when about to receive the sacred mysteries.

In the next place it should be made clear to the faithful that just as one who receives the Eucharist well-disposed and perfectly prepared is adorned with the choicest gifts of heavenly grace, so on the contrary he who approaches unprepared not only derives no advantage but even incurs the most serious loss and misfortunes. The very best and most salutary things possess this peculiarity, that when seasonably made use of they produce happy results, but on the contrary are pernicious and destructive when used unseasonably. Hence it is not to be wondered at that while the great and precious gifts of God, when received by a well-disposed soul, are a powerful help towards the attainment of heavenly glory, they, on the other hand, bring only eternal death to us if we receive them unworthily.

This is well illustrated by the example of the Ark of the Lord. The Israelites possessed nothing more sacred than the Ark of the Covenant. Through it the Lord had bestowed signal and numerous blessings on them. But when it was borne away by the Philistines it brought on them a deadly plague, and disastrous calamities, along with eternal disgrace. It is the same with food which, when received into a healthy stomach, sustains and nourishes the body; but on the contrary, it engenders grave disorders if received into a stomach that is indisposed and out of order.

56.—Preparation of soul.

(*a*) The first preparation requisite is to know how to distinguish table from table—this sacred table from profane tables—this heavenly bread from common bread.[1] This we do, when we firmly believe that the Eucharist contains the true body and blood of the Lord, whom the angels adore in heaven, at whose orders *the pillars of heaven fear and tremble*,[2] of whose glory *all the earth is full*.[3] This, as the Apostle instructs us, is to discern the body of the Lord, venerating the magnitude of the mystery rather than seeking to penetrate its essence by over-curious investigations.

(*b*) Another indispensable preparation is to ask ourselves if we are at peace with all others, if we love our neighbour truly and sincerely : *Therefore if thou offerest thy gift at the altar, and there shall remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and first go to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*.[4]

(*c*) In the third place we should carefully examine our conscience to see whether it is defiled by any mortal sin that has to be repented of and blotted out by the assistance of contrition and Confession [before Communion]. The Council of Trent has defined that to no one no matter how contrite, who is conscious of mortal sin on his soul, and who has an opportunity of confessing, is it lawful to receive the Blessed Eucharist, until he has purified himself by sacramental Confession.

(*d*) The fourth disposition necessary is to reflect in the silence of our souls how unworthy we are of the divine gift which is given us by the Lord ; and with the Centurion, of whom our Lord Himself declared He had not *found so great faith in Israel*, we should cry out from our hearts : *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof*.[5]

(*e*) Let us also ask ourselves whether we have the right to say along with St. Peter : *Lord Thou knowest that I love Thee* ;[6] and we should bear in mind that the man who sat down at the Lord's feast without a *nuptial garment* was cast *into exterior darkness*,[7] and condemned to eternal torments.

57.—Preparation of body.

Not alone is preparation of the soul necessary —there is need also for preparation of the body. Thus, we must be fasting when we approach the holy table—that is to say, we must have neither eaten nor drunk anything from at least the preceding midnight up to the very moment in which we receive the Blessed Eucharist.

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[1] 1 Cor. x. 21. [2] Job xxvi. 11. [3] Is. vi. 3. [4] Matt. v. 23, 24. [5] Matt. viii. 8. [6] John xxi. 15. [7] Matt. xxii. 13.

These, then, are about all that should be observed by the faithful in preparing to receive the sacred mysteries profitably. All the other dispositions may be easily reduced to those heads which we have just enumerated.

XII.—OBLIGATION OF RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

58.—Each one bound to communicate at least once a year, but exhorted to communicate frequently.

To avoid the danger of people being made less prompt to receive this sacrament, on the pretext that the preparation demanded by them is too laborious and difficult, the faithful should be frequently reminded that the law regarding the reception of the Blessed Eucharist admits of no exceptions. Moreover, it has been decreed by the Church that whoever does not approach the holy table at least once a year—at Easter—runs the risk of excommunication.

Let not the faithful, however, imagine that it is enough to obey this precept and receive the Lord's body only once a year; but let them be well persuaded that they should receive Holy Communion frequently—whether monthly, or weekly, or daily cannot be decided by any fixed or general rule. The standard, however, laid down by St. Augustine admits of no doubt: "Live in such a manner as to be able to receive Holy Communion every day."

Hence it will be the pastor's duty frequently to exhort the faithful to try and nourish their souls each day with this heavenly bread, just as they do not fail to supply their bodies each day with the necessary food, and to point out to them that spiritual food is not less necessary to the soul than corporal food to the body. It will be also very useful to recall to their minds the great and heavenly gifts which, as we have already pointed out, we derive from sacramental Communion; and it will also be useful to refer to that figure which is found in the manna with which the Israelites had to refresh their bodily powers each day. Along with this may be cited the authority of the Fathers who earnestly recommended the frequent reception of this sacrament. The words "You sin daily—communicate daily" do not express the opinion of St. Augustine alone, but anyone who pays attention to the subject will easily see that such was the opinion of all the Fathers who have written on the question.

59.—The practice of the ancient Church regarding frequent Communion.

Indeed we see from the Acts of the Apostles, that there was a time when the faithful received Holy Communion every day. All who then professed the Christian religion were inflamed with such true and generous charity that devoting themselves unceasingly to prayer and other works of piety, they were ever found prepared to receive the holy mysteries of the Lord's body daily. Later on, when this usage seems to have been interrupted, the holy Pope and martyr, Anacletus, partially revived it. He decreed that all the ministers assisting at the Sacrifice of the Mass should approach Holy Communion, affirming that the practice was of Apostolic institution. Moreover, it was for a long time the practice of the Church that, as soon as the Sacrifice was complete, and when the priest had himself taken the Blessed Eucharist, he turned to the congregation, and invited the faithful to the holy table in these words: "Brethren, approach to receive Communion." And thereupon those who were prepared received the sacred mysteries with deepest fervour and devotion.

But the time came when charity and love of piety had grown so cold that the faithful approached only very rarely to Holy Communion. Then it was laid down by Pope Fabian that all should receive the Blessed Eucharist three times a year —at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. This rule was in course of time confirmed by many Councils, and especially by the first of Agdé.

Matters having at length reached such a degree of decay that not only was this holy and salutary practice neglected, but Communion was even deferred for several years. The general Council of the Lateran decreed that all the faithful should receive the Lord's body at least once a year at Easter, and that those who neglected to do so should be cut off from the society of the faithful.

60.—Children before the use of reason not to receive Communion.

Although this law, sanctioned as it is by the authority of God and His Church, concerns all the faithful, it must, however, be explained that they who by reason of their tender age have not yet arrived at the use of reason are exempt from the obligation. They are incapable of distinguishing the Blessed Eucharist from unconsecrated and common bread, and consequently cannot bring with them to its reception the requisite piety and devotion. In any event it would seem inconsistent to act otherwise; for in instituting this sacrament our Lord said: *Take and eat*—words which seem to exclude infants who clearly are unable of themselves to take and eat. In some places, indeed, an ancient practice existed of administering the Blessed Eucharist even to infants; but for the reasons already mentioned, as well as on account of motives in keeping with Christian piety, the practice in question has been long discontinued by the authority of the Church.

61.—The age at which children should communicate.

With regard to the age at which the holy mysteries should be given to children, the father and the confessor will be the best judges—to them it belongs to examine and ascertain from the children whether they have a sufficient knowledge of, and a desire for, this sacrament.

62.—The insane.

To those labouring under insanity, and at the same time incapable of acts of piety, the Eucharist should not be administered. If, however, before falling into insanity they have evinced sentiments of piety and religion, the Blessed Eucharist may, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Carthage, be administered to them, provided no danger of vomiting, or other indignity and inconvenience is apprehended.

XIII.—COMMUNION UNDER BOTH SPECIES

63.—The celebrant alone to communicate under both species.

Regarding the rite to be observed in communicating, the pastor will explain that the law of the Church forbids anyone except the priest consecrating the body of our Lord in the sacrifice to communicate under both species, unless by special permission of the Church. For although it is true, as the Council of Trent points out, that Christ our Lord at the last supper instituted and administered this sacrament under the species both of bread and wine, nevertheless it does not follow that by doing so our Lord and Saviour established a law that the sacred mysteries should be administered to all the faithful under both kinds. Nay, even He Himself, when speaking of this sacrament, often makes mention of it under one kind only, as, for instance: *If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever;* and *the bread which I will give is My flesh for the life of the world;* and: *He that eateth this bread shall live for ever.*[1]

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[1] John vi. 52, etc.

64.—Reasons for this legislation.

It will be clear, however, that the Church was influenced by many and cogent reasons in not only approving of the practice of communicating under only one kind, but also in confirming it by solemn decree :—

(*a*) In the first place, no precaution should be omitted to guard against the blood of our Lord being spilled on the ground —an accident that could not easily be avoided if the chalice had to be administered to a large crowd of people.

(*b*) In the second place, since the Blessed Eucharist should be always in readiness for the sick, it was greatly to be feared that, were the species of wine left long unconsumed, it might turn acid.

(*c*) In the third place, there are very many who cannot bear the taste or even the smell of wine ; and hence the Church very wisely ordained that the faithful should communicate under the species of bread alone. Otherwise what is intended for the nutriment of the soul might prove injurious to the health of the body.

(*d*) It may also be added that in many countries wine is extremely scarce and can only be procured at great expense from distant lands.

(*e*) Finally—and most important of all—it was necessary to uproot the heresy of those who pretended that Jesus Christ was not whole and entire under each species, but that His body alone was contained under the species of bread, and His blood alone under the species of wine. In order, therefore, to bring the truth of Catholic teaching more plainly before the eyes of all, Communion under only one kind—that of bread—was most wisely introduced.

Other reasons for this usage have been collected by those who have written on the matter, and can easily be explained by the pastor if he thinks it necessary.

XIV.—THE MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

65.—Priests alone are the proper ministers of the Eucharist.

We have now to speak of the minister, not that many are in ignorance as to this point but in order not to omit anything connected with the doctrine of the Eucharist.

The pastor, then, will teach that to priests alone has been given the power to consecrate and to administer the Blessed

Eucharist. The usage in the Church has always been, the Council of Trent explains, for the people to receive Communion from the hands of the priest, and for the celebrant to communicate himself—a usage which, as the Council has shown, proceeds from Apostolic tradition, and must be scrupulously retained, especially in view of the fact that Christ our Lord left us a striking example when He consecrated His most sacred body and with His own hands distributed it to His Apostles.

The laity are even forbidden to touch the sacred vessels.

Moreover, to enhance as much as possible the dignity of so august a sacrament, not only has the power of administering it been confined to priests alone, but by a special law the Church has forbidden all who are not in Orders to touch the sacred vessels, the linen, or other things connected with the consecration, unless in case of necessity.

Both priests and people may hence learn with what sentiments of piety and holiness those should be filled who consecrate, administer, or receive the Blessed Eucharist.

66.—The unworthiness of the priest does not lessen the efficacy of the sacrament.

At the same time, what has been already said regarding the other sacraments—that they are validly administered, even by unholy hands provided the matter and form are properly employed—holds good with regard to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Faith teaches us that the effect of the sacraments does not depend on the merit of the minister, but on the power and virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such, then, are the truths to be set forth regarding the Eucharist considered as a sacrament.

DECREE OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF THE COUNCIL ON DAILY COMMUNION

(*20th December*, 1905)

THE Council of Trent, having in view the unspeakable treasures of grace derived by the faithful from the reception of the Most Holy Eucharist, makes the following declaration : "The holy Synod would desire that at every Mass the faithful who are present should communicate not only spritually, but also sacramentally." [1] These words plainly declare the wish of the Church that all Christians should be daily nourished by this heavenly banquet, and should derive therefrom more and more abundant fruits of sanctification.

The wish of Jesus Christ.

And this wish of the Council is in perfect agreement with that desire wherewith Christ our Lord was inflamed when He instituted this divine sacrament. More than once, and in no ambiguous terms, He Himself pointed out the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood frequently, especially in these words : *This is the bread that cometh down from heaven ; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead : he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.* [2] Now, from this comparison of the food of angels with bread and with the manna, it was easy for His disciples to understand that, just as the body is daily nourished with bread, and as the Jews were daily nourished with manna in the desert, so the Christian soul can daily partake of this heavenly bread and be refreshed thereby. Moreover, from the fact that in the Lord's Prayer, we are bidden to ask for *our daily bread*, the holy Fathers of the Church all but unanimously teach that we must understand not so much that material bread which is the support of the body, as the Eucharistic bread which ought to be our daily food.

The principal object of daily Communion.

Moreover, the desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet aims at this particular result, that the faithful, being united to God by means of the sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, wash away their daily failings, and avoid these graver sins to which human frailty is liable—its primary purpose, then, is not to consider the honour and reverence due to our Lord nor to serve as a prize or reward of virtue bestowed on the recipients. [3] Hence the holy Council of Trent calls the Eucharist "the antidote whereby we are delivered from daily faults and preserved from deadly sins." [4]

Communion during the first centuries.

Thoroughly grasping the spirit of this desire on the part of God, the first Christians daily flocked to the holy table of life and strength. *They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in*

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[1] Sess. XXII. cap. vi. [2] John vi. 59. [3] St. Augustine, Serm. 57 in Matth., de Orat. Dom., n. 7. [4] Sess. XIII. cap. ii.

the communication of the breaking of bread.[1] And that this practice was continued during later ages, not without great fruit of sanctity and perfection, the holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers bear witness.

Discussions as to the dispositions requisite for daily Communion.

But when piety had grown cold, and more especially later on when the influence of the plague of Jansenism was spread far and wide, disputes arose concerning the dispositions necessary for frequent or daily Communion, and the disputants vied with one another in demanding as necessary more and more stringent conditions. The result of such disputes was that very few were considered worthy to receive the Blessed Eucharist daily and to derive from this most healing sacrament its more abundant fruits; the rest being content to partake of it once a year, or once a month, or at the utmost weekly. Nay, to such a pitch was rigorism carried, that whole classes of persons were excluded from frequent Communion; for instance, those engaged in trade, or those living in the state of matrimony.

Others, however, went to the opposite extreme. Under the persuasion that daily Communion was commanded by divine precept, and in order that no day might pass without Communion, they held, along with other practices contrary to the approved usage of the Church, that the Holy Eucharist ought to be received, and in fact they actually administered it, even on Good Friday.

Decrees of the Holy See.

The Holy See did not fail to discharge its duty. By a decree of this Sacred Congregation, which begins with the words *Cum ad aures*, issued on the 12th February, A.D. 1679, with the approbation of Innocent XI, it condemned these errors, and put a stop to such abuses; at the same time declaring that all the faithful of whatsoever class, merchants or married persons not excepted, might be admitted to frequent Communion, according to the devotion of each one and the judgment of his confessor. And on the 7th December, 1690, by the decree *Sanctissimus Dominus*, of Pope Alexander VIII, the proposition of Baius, demanding of those who wished to approach the holy table a perfectly pure love of God without any admixture of defect, was condemned.

The leaven of Jansenism still remained.

Yet the poison of Jansenism, which, under the pretext of the honour and reverence due to the Holy Eucharist, had infected the minds even of good men, did not entirely disappear. The controversy as to the dispositions requisite for right and lawful frequentation of Communion survived the declarations of the Holy See; so much so, indeed, that certain theologians of good repute judged that daily Communion should be allowed to the faithful only in rare cases, and under many conditions.

The traditional doctrine on the subject.

On the other hand, there were not wanting men of learning and piety, who allowed a more ready use of this practice which is so salutary and so pleasing to God, and who, in accordance with the teaching of the Fathers, maintained that there was no precept of the Church demanding more perfect dispositions in the case of daily than of weekly or monthly Communion; and that the effects of daily Communion would be far more abundant than those of Communion received weekly or monthly.

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[1] Acts ii. 42.

Recent controversy. In our own day the controversy has been multiplied, and not without bitterness, so that the minds of confessors and the consciences of the faithful have been disturbed, to the no small detriment of Christian piety and devotion. Accordingly, certain distinguished personages and pastors of souls, have urgently besought His Holiness Pope Pius X to deign to settle, by his supreme authority, the question concerning the dispositions requisite for daily Communion, in order that this usage, which is so salutary and so pleasing to God, might not only suffer no further decrease among the faithful, but might rather be promoted and everywhere propagated—especially in times like these when religion and the Catholic faith are attacked on all sides, and the true love of God and genuine piety are found lacking in no small degree. And His Holiness, being most earnestly desirous out of his abundant solicitude and zeal, that the faithful should be invited to the sacred banquet and should avail themselves of its immense fruits as often as possible, and even daily, committed the aforesaid question to this Sacred Congregation, to be looked into and decided once for all.

Decision of the Sacred Congregation. Accordingly, the Sacred Congregation of the Council, in a plenary Session held on the 16th December, 1905, submitted the whole matter to a very careful scrutiny; and, after sedulously considering the reasons adduced on either side, determined and declared as follows:—

1. Frequent and daily Communion, being most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, shall be accessible to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the holy table with a right and devout intention, can be hindered therefrom.

2. Now, the right intention consists in this, that he who approaches the holy table should do so, not out of routine, or vain glory, or human respect, but to please God, be more closely united with Him by charity, and avail himself of this divine remedy for his weaknesses and defects.

3. Although it is most expedient that those who receive Communion frequently or daily should be free from venial sins, at least such as are fully deliberate, and from any affection thereto, nevertheless it is sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the resolution of never sinning any more; and, if they have this sincere resolution it is impossible but that daily communicants should gradually emancipate themselves from even venial sins, and from all affection thereto.

4. But whereas the Sacraments of the New Law, while taking effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better;

therefore, care is to be taken that serious preparation should precede Holy Communion, and that a suitable thanksgiving according to each one's strength, circumstances, and duties, should follow.

5. In order that frequent and daily Communion may be practised with greater prudence and may be accompanied by more abundant merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, are to be careful not to dissuade anyone from frequent and daily Communion, provided that he is in a state of grace, and approaches with a right intention.

6. But since it is plain that, by the frequent or daily reception of the Holy Eucharist, union with Christ is increased, the spiritual life more abundantly fostered, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and a still surer pledge of everlasting happiness bestowed on the recipient, therefore parish priests, confessors, and preachers should—in accordance with the approved teaching of the Roman Catechism[1]—frequently, and with great zeal, exhort the faithful to this devout and salutary practice.

7. Frequent and daily Communion shall be promoted especially in religious institutions of all kinds; with regard to which, however, the decree *Quemadmodum*, issued on the 17th December 1890, by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, is to remain in force. It is also to be especially promoted in ecclesiastical seminaries, the students of which aspire to the service of the altar; as also in all Christian educational establishments of whatever kind.

8. In the case of religious institutes, whether of solemn or simple vows, in whose rules, or constitutions, or calendars, Communion is assigned to certain fixed days, such regulations are to be regarded as *directive* and not *preceptive*. The appointed number of Communions should be regarded as a minimum for the devotion of the religious. Therefore, more frequent, or even daily access to the Eucharistic table must always be allowed them, according to the principles above laid down in this decree. And in order that all religious of both sexes may properly understand the provisions of this decree, the Superior of each house shall see that it is read in community, in the vernacular, every year within the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

9. Finally, after the publication of this decree, all ecclesiastical writers shall cease from contentious controversies concerning the dispositions requisite for frequent and daily Communion.

All this having been reported to His Holiness Pope Pius X by the undersigned Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, in an audience held on the 17th December, 1905, His Holiness ratified and confirmed the present decree, and ordered it to be published, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. He further ordered that it should be sent to all bishops and regular prelates, to be communicated by them to their respective seminaries, parishes, religious institutes, and priests; and that in their reports on the state of their respective dioceses or institutes, they should inform the Holy See concerning the execution of the matters therein determined.

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[1] Part ii., n. 60.

Given at Rome, the 20th day of December, 1905.

✠ VINCENT, Card., *Bishop of Palestrina, Prefect.*

CAJETAN DE LAI, *Secretary.*

DECREE OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF INDULGENCES

Dispensing daily Communicants from the weekly Confession heretofore necessary for the gaining of Indulgences

His Holiness Pope Pius X most earnestly desires that the praiseworthy custom, so very acceptable to God, by which the faithful approach daily to Holy Communion, in a state of grace and with a right intention, should become more general and lead to more virtuous lives. For which reason, graciously and gladly receiving the many petitions addressed to him through the Most Eminent Cardinal Casimir Gennari, he has determined to grant a special favour to all those who follow or desire to follow the practice aforesaid.

Now Pope Clement XIII, of happy memory, by a decree of this Sacred Congregation of the 9th day of December, 1763, granted to all the faithful, "who, striving to purify their souls by frequent confession of their sins, were accustomed, when not legitimately hindered, to approach the sacrament of Penance at least once a week, and who were not conscious of having committed any mortal sin since their last confession, the privilege of gaining all indulgences whatsoever, without the actual confession which otherwise would be necessary for gaining them: this concession, however, being in no wise applicable to the indulgences of a jubilee, whether ordinary or extraordinary, or to other indulgences of a similar character, for the gaining of which, besides the other works enjoined, sacramental confession must be made within the time prescribed."

Now, however, to all the faithful who, being in the state of grace, are accustomed to receive the Blessed Eucharist daily with a right and devout intention, even though they omit their daily Communion once or twice in the week, our Most Holy Father Pius X grants that they may avail themselves of the Indult of Clement XIII, of happy memory, without being obliged to make the weekly confession which would otherwise be still necessary for the gaining of the indulgences that occur during the week. His Holiness, moreover, has graciously declared that this favour shall hold good for future times. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome, the 14th day of February, 1906.

A. Card. TRIPEPI, *Prefect.*

✠ D. PANICI, *Archbishop of Laodicea, Secretary.*

THE BLESSED EUCHARIST—(*continued*)

2. THE INSTITUTION AND EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

Q. When did Jesus Christ institute the sacrament of the Eucharist?

A. Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the last supper, which He took with His disciples, the evening before His passion.

Q. Why did Jesus Christ institute the Most Holy Eucharist?

A. Jesus Christ instituted the Most Holy Eucharist for three principal reasons :—

1. To be the Sacrifice of the New Law;
2. To be the food of our souls;
3. To be a perpetual memorial of His passion and death and a precious pledge both of His love for us and of eternal life.

Q. Why did Jesus Christ institute this sacrament under the appearances of bread and wine?

A. Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament under the appearances of bread and wine, because the Eucharist, being intended to be our spiritual nourishment, it was therefore fitting that it should be given to us under the form of food and drink.

Q. What are the effects which the Most Holy Eucharist produces in us?

A. The principal effects which the Most Holy Eucharist produces in those who worthily receive it are these: (1) It preserves and increases the life of the soul, which is grace, just as natural food sustains and increases the life of the body; (2) It remits venial sins and preserves us from mortal sin; (3) It produces spiritual consolation.

Q. Does not the Most Holy Eucharist produce other effects in us?

A. Yes; the Most Holy Eucharist produces three other effects in us: (1) It weakens our passions, and in particular it allays in us the fires of concupiscence; (2) It increases in us the fervour of charity towards God and our neighbour, and aids us to act in conformity with the will of Jesus Christ; (3) It gives us a pledge of future glory and of the resurrection of our body.

3. THE DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION WORTHILY

Q. Does the sacrament of the Eucharist always produce its marvellous effects in us?

A. The sacrament of the Eucharist produces its marvellous effects in us when it is received with the requisite dispositions.

Q. What conditions are necessary to make a good Communion?

A. To make a good Communion three conditions are necessary: (1) To be in the grace of God; (2) To be fasting from midnight until the moment of Holy Communion;

(3) To know what we are about to receive, and to approach Holy Communion devoutly.

Q. What is meant by being in the grace of God ?

A. To be in the grace of God means to have a pure conscience and to be free from every mortal sin.

Q. What should one who knows that he is in mortal sin do before receiving Communion ?

A. One who knows that he is in mortal sin must make a good confession before going to Holy Communion, for even an act of perfect contrition is not enough without confession to enable one who is in mortal sin to receive Holy Communion properly.

Q. Why does not even an act of perfect contrition suffice to enable one who knows he is in mortal sin to go to Communion ?

A. Because the Church, out of respect for this sacrament, has ordained that no one in mortal sin should dare to go to Communion without first going to confession ?

Q. Does he who goes to Communion in mortal sin receive Jesus Christ ?

A. He who goes to Communion in mortal sin receives Jesus Christ but not His grace ; moreover, he commits a sacrilege and renders himself deserving of sentence of damnation.

Q. What sort of fast is required before Communion ?

A. Before Communion there is required a natural fast which is broken by taking the least thing by way of food or drink.

Q. If one were to swallow a particle that had remained between the teeth, or a drop of water while washing, might he still go to Communion ?

A. If one were to swallow a particle that had remained between the teeth, or a drop of water while washing, he might still go to Communion, because in both cases these things would either not be taken as food or drink, or they would have already lost the nature of either.

Q. Is it ever allowed to go to Communion after having broken the fast ?

A. To go to Communion after having broken the fast is permitted to the sick, who are in danger of death, and to those who on account of prolonged illness have received a special dispensation from the Pope. Communion given to the sick in danger of death is called *Viaticum*, because it supports them on their way from this life to eternity.

Q. What is meant by the words : To know what we are about to receive ?

A. To know what we are about to receive means to know and firmly believe what is taught in Christian doctrine concerning this sacrament.

Q. What do the words : To receive Holy Communion with devotion mean ?

A. To receive Holy Communion with devotion means to approach Holy Communion with humility and modesty in person and dress ; and to make a preparation before, and an act of thanksgiving after, Holy Communion.

Q. In what does the preparation before Communion consist ?

A. Preparation before Communion consists in meditating for some time on Whom we are about to receive, and on who we are ; and in making acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, adoration, humility, and desire to receive Jesus Christ.

Q. In what does the thanksgiving after Communion consist ?

A. Thanksgiving after Communion consists in keeping ourselves recollected in order to honour the Lord who is within us ; renewing our acts of faith, of hope, of charity, of adoration, of thanksgiving, of offerings, and of requests, especially for those graces which are most necessary for ourselves and for those for whom we are bound to pray.

Q. What should we do during the day on which we have received Communion ?

A. During the day on which we have received Communion, we should remain as recollected as possible, occupy ourselves in works of piety, and discharge the duties of our state with greater diligence.

Q. How long does Jesus Christ abide within us after Holy Communion ?

A. After Holy Communion Jesus Christ abides within us by His grace as long as we commit no mortal sin ; and He abides within us by His Real Presence until the sacramental species are consumed.

4. The Way to go to Communion

Q. How should we act while receiving Holy Communion ?

A. In the act of receiving Holy Communion we should be kneeling, hold our head slightly raised, our eyes modest and fixed on the sacred Host, our mouth sufficiently open, and the tongue slightly out over the lips.

Q. How should the Communion-cloth be held ?

A. The Communion-cloth should be held in such a way as to receive the sacred Host in case it should fall.

Q. When should the sacred Host be swallowed ?

A. We should try to swallow the sacred Host as soon as possible, and we should avoid spitting for some time.

Q. If the sacred Host should cling to the palate what should be done ?

A. If the sacred Host should cling to the palate it should be removed with the tongue, but never with the finger.

5. The Precept of Holy Communion

Q. When are we bound to receive Communion ?

A. We are bound to go to Communion once a year, at Easter, each one in his own parish ; and also when in danger of death.

Q. At what age does the precept of paschal Communion begin to bind ?

A. The precept of paschal Communion begins to bind as soon as a child is capable of receiving with the requisite dispositions.

Q. Do they sin who are old enough to receive Communion and do not ?

A. They who are old enough to receive Communion and do not either because they are unwilling, or because through their own fault they are not instructed, undoubtedly sin. Their parents or guardians also sin if the delay of Communion is owing to their fault, and they shall have to render a strict account to God for it.

Q. Is it a good and useful thing to go often to Communion?

A. It is an excellent thing to go to Communion often, and even daily in accordance with the desire of the Church, provided we do so with the requisite dispositions.

Q. How often may we go to Holy Communion?

A. We may go to Holy Communion as often as we are advised to do so by a pious and learned confessor.

Ninth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE GREAT GOODNESS OF GOD IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

If the Eucharist is, as we have already seen, *a mystery of faith, par excellence,* on account of the prodigies and miracles it contains, it is also the greatest excess of divine love for us, and hence the Fathers have called it the sacrament of Love.

Of all the gifts of God there is none in which His divine goodness and love are so resplendent as in this, and that for two reasons which, to animate your devotion, I now propose to discuss—the first arises from the nature of the sacrament; the second from the ends for which Jesus Christ instituted it.

As for the first point, when I say *the nature of this sacrament* I mean three things: The quality of the gift bestowed on us; the circumstance of the time in which it was given us; and, finally, the wonderful and ineffable manner selected by divine wisdom to impart it.

1. *The quality of the gift.* Let it suffice to say that God gives us His whole Self—His body, His blood, His soul, His divinity—and hence we may at once say, with St. Augustine, that nothing more noble, nothing more great, nothing more precious, nothing more expressive of His love for us could the Lord have given us, all wise, all rich, all powerful though He is. And in truth, what more remains for Him to give, after having given us Himself? No; the Church has no dearer pledge, no greater treasure than this sacrament in which is contained the Humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and, along with Him, a perennial, inexhaustible fountain of all graces and blessings.

2. But the love of God for us appears in still greater relief from the *circumstances of the time* in which this gift was given us. Had Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist at the time when the people ran in crowds after Him, carried away by His teaching, His virtues, His miracles; when they desired to make Him king in the desert; and when they received Him with transports of joy in Jerusalem, proclaiming Him to be the Son of David, and the true Messiah blessed by the Lord,—such excess of goodness should even then cause us to wonder at His having willed to repay with a gift such as this the

homage and honours that were all too far below His infinite merits. But how much more should we be astonished at the thought that to give us this proof of His love He selected that very time when His death was being plotted—the very eve of His passion—nay, the very hour in which He was being betrayed by His traitorous Apostle? And what does this signify? It signifies that the love of Jesus Christ for us had greater influence over Him than all the malice of those who were plotting against Him—nay, influenced Him even in spite of that torrent of iniquity, profanation, outrage, and sacrilege, to which He well foresaw He was to be exposed in this sacrament.

3. Finally, if we reflect on *the manner in which He instituted this sacrament*, who cannot see that in order to institute it He had to raise Himself by many prodigies above all the laws of nature—diminish His sovereign grandeur, eclipse His infinite majesty, and hide His glory under the veil of a few obscure accidents? If, as St. Paul says, the Incarnation was a mystery of extreme humiliation, nay, even annihilation—because in it He hid His Divinity under the veil of our flesh: *He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant*[1]—what shall we say of a mystery in which He hides His Humanity as well as His Divinity under the symbols of bread and wine? Are not the words, *He emptied Himself*, verified still more here? If it was annihilation for Him to have taken the form of a servant, that is of man, is it not much more so to have taken the form of material food and drink?

A gift such as this exceeds every demonstration of love. Think, reflect, as much as you will, and it is impossible for any mind, either of men or angels, to find a heart so dear, so lovable, so loving. Hence rightly has St. John the Evangelist, speaking of this mystery, said that although Jesus Christ during the whole course of His life had ever given us signal marks of His love, yet He gave us still more tender and signal proofs of it at the end of His life: *Having loved His own who were in the world He loved them to the end.*[2] In that hour it was that the near approach of the moment in which He was to leave us stirred His heart with such intense affection for us and moved Him so deeply in our regard, as to lead Him to this unlooked for invention of love. Then, indeed, as the Church exclaims, He exhausted the very riches of His love for us.

For the sake of greater clearness, and for your better instruction, let us consider the different ends for which Jesus Christ willed to institute this sacrament and give us His very Self—we shall thus be able to understand the corresponding obligations we are under to Him.

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[1] Phil. ii. 7.

[2] John xiii. 1.

His principal ends were three : to be our companion, to be our food, and to be our victim. Our companion in the tabernacle wherein He permanently resides; our food at the Eucharistic banquet ; our victim in the daily Sacrifice on our altars.

1. *To be the companion of our life.* When He had disclosed to His disciples that He was about to leave them and return to the Father, He softened the bitterness of that announcement by promising that He would not leave them orphans ;[1] that though He was about to deprive them of His visible presence, yet He would, in another way, remain with them, even to the end of the world. Now, what He promised them, He promised us—a promise fulfilled by Him each day in the sacrament of our altars.

And on these altars, Jesus Christ, hidden under the sacramental species, but at the same time ever glorious in His essence, almighty, eternal, and magnificent, such as He actually is at the right hand of His heavenly Father, continually dwells amongst us to welcome us close at hand, lend a ready ear to our supplications, and leave nothing unheard that can be for our good. Here He enables us unceasingly to enjoy His presence, admits us at all hours to His audience, to enable us to visit Him and speak familiarly with Him. *Behold I am with you all days, even to the end of the world*[2]—from His tabernacle, from that consecrated Host, He repeats to us what He said to His disciples : " Behold I am with you not merely for a day, or a month, or a year, but for all time, to the very end of the world. Though I shall have ascended into heaven, do not imagine you have lost Me—I, your Father, your Redeemer, your God,—I, in person, remain here to be your refuge in all your necessities ; that which you here adore is My true, living body ; behold I am with you even to the consummation of the world." Oh, how privileged the people of God to have their God so near them, a member of their household, their familiar friend. To this loving end, we should correspond by frequent and devout visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

First of all, gratitude demands this ; for if Jesus loves us so far as to be always with us and in our midst, if He even proclaims in sacred Scripture that this is His dearest wish, His greatest delight : *My delight is to be with the children of men,* is it not a most just, a most sacred, and a most bounden duty for us to spend as much time as we can near Him, honour Him, and show Him respect by our visits ? What horrible ingratitude it would be to neglect Him, and live forgetful of Him ? How monstrous it is in us that He is more anxious about us than we about Him ?

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[1] John xiv. 18.

[2] Matt. xxviii. 20.

Next, our own interest demands this. The presence of Jesus Christ, in the Blessed Sacrament, is of infinite advantage to us. He is seated there on His throne of love, of goodness, of grace, and the very miracles which He visibly wrought in this world, when travelling up and down Palestine, He still accomplishes invisibly in this divine sacrament. And hence at the feet of Jesus we should seek for the remedy for our troubles, comfort in our afflictions, contrition for our faults, victory over our evil inclinations, strength against temptation, increase of faith, hope, and charity—a single visit, well made, is often sufficient for Him to straightway change the disposition of our hearts.

From this it will be readily seen that this should be one of our specially favourite devotions, being as it is the solidest in itself, the most conformable to the designs of Jesus Christ, and at the same time the most salutary and advantageous for us. We may sometimes imagine what a happiness it was for St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalen, and the first disciples, to be able to speak with Jesus Christ when visible on earth. But is it not the same Jesus whom we possess truly and really present on our altars, even though He is veiled and invisible? The fact of His having veiled His majesty, instead of diminishing the greatness of the gift, rather increases it; for were He to show Himself to us, as He really is, surrounded by glory, not alone should we not have the great advantage derived from the merit of our faith, but not one of us would, for very fear and reverence, dare to draw near to Him. And, moreover, do we not know from the Gospel, that when He willed to make the three Apostles, Peter, James, and John, witnesses of His glorious transfiguration on Thabor, they were so overwhelmed with the dazzling splendours of His Divinity that they fell prostrate and terrified to the ground: *They fell upon their face, and were very much afraid.*[1] The fact, then, that Jesus Christ has made Himself invisible is an act of the greatest kindness and love, since it renders access to Him more easy and more confident.

How much better would it be, if, instead of so many useless, idle, and sometimes even sinful visits to various people, we were to draw near the feet of Jesus, and open out our hearts before Him? How inconsistent it sounds that we can find time for so much visiting—that the streets, the parks, the places of public amusement are frequented by crowds of people of all sorts and conditions, while Jesus Christ very often remains alone and deserted on the altar! What indignity! What ingratitude! And yet His love for us does not even stop at this.

2. The second and yet more admirable end for which Jesus Christ

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[1] Matt. xvii. 6.

gave Himself to us in this divine sacrament was to be our food in Holy Communion.

If He had no other end in view than to establish His dwelling-place in our midst, console us by His presence, receive our homage, listen to our requests, and impart to us His personal benediction, this would indeed have been a trait of goodness beyond compare. But He has not thus limited Himself. His boundless love led Him to be enclosed in the sacred Host, to be placed on our tongue, descend into our breast, become incorporated with us, and unite us to Himself in the closest bonds of union.

His constant presence and nearness was not enough for Him—He further desired intimate union and almost identity of Himself with us, as He has declared in these words: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him.*[1]

There is nothing in the world that is more intimately united to us, and becomes more ours than the food that sustains us. By the agency of nature, it is converted into our substance in such a way as to become the self-same thing as we—one single flesh, one only person. In like manner Jesus Christ, by means of the Eucharistic food, unites Himself to us in such a way that as He Himself says, He abides in us and we in Him: *He who eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in Him.* There is no difference between the other foods and this except that they are changed into us and become our substance, while this changes us into itself. "Thou shalt not change Me into thee, but thou shalt be changed into Me." This change is not a change of our substance into that of Jesus Christ who is incorruptible and immortal, but of our spirit into that of Jesus Christ who by His flesh communicates His sovereign virtues to us to enable us to live a divine life: *He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.*[2]

Was there ever so great a prodigy of love and charity? Who could have imagined anything like it? A God becoming the food of men, uniting Himself to them, becoming one with them! And that not merely once, but over and over again, without limit or restriction—and not only permitting it, but commanding it under the grave threat of being excluded from eternal life: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.*[3]

How, then, should we respond to this most loving Saviour, who, spontaneously and with such abounding charity, has deigned to give Himself to us as our food? Assuredly should we be inflamed with a holy ambition, a holy eagerness to approach this heavenly table frequently, and to live in such a way as to be always disposed to receive, even daily, this divine bread which daily comes down from heaven for our sakes : *This is the bread come down from heaven.* But alas, how often does He meet with nothing but distaste, or coldness, or carelessness, or contempt !

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[1] John vi. 57.

[2] John vi. 58.

[3] John vi. 54.

The majority of men resemble the ungrateful persons referred to in the Gospel parable. These were invited to a great supper, and who could believe but that they would at once accept the invitation ? Yet there was not even one to accept it—all excused themselves on one pretext or another—*And they began all at once to make excuse.*[1] Not otherwise does it happen in the case of many Catholics. This great supper was a figure of the Eucharistic banquet—that great and divine supper served with the bread of angels—with the flesh of a God made man ; and to this supper Jesus Christ Himself earnestly invites us : *Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.*[2] Yet, notwithstanding all this, numbers of Catholics, some through sloth, some through love of sin, some through over-anxiety about worldly affairs, remain aloof—the precept and threats of the Church are necessary to compel them ; and if it was not for a tincture of human respect, they would not be induced to approach even at Easter. Here, then, we have another and still more monstrous example of unthankfulness and ingratitude to the infinite love of Jesus.

3. But there is yet a third excess of love. Jesus Christ left us Himself in this divine sacrament, not only to be our companion, and our food, but also as a victim and as a true Sacrifice in the holy Mass—a Sacrifice which would be a perpetual memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross, and would renew it in a real though mystic manner, and apply its fruits to souls unceasingly. Hence to institute this sacrament, He selected the *night in which He was betrayed* into the hands of His enemies ; hence, too, in giving His body and blood to His disciples, He reminded them that it was the self-same body, and the self-same blood that was soon to be immolated and poured forth on the altar of the Cross : *This is the body which shall be given for you—this is the blood which shall be poured forth for you* ; and hence also, in that very moment in which He ordained them priests of the New Testament He commanded them to renew His passion by the celebration of the Sacrifice : *Do this, in commemoration of Me—as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord.*[3]

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[1] Luke xiv. 18. [2] Cant. v. 1. [3] 1 Cor. xi. 26.

Not content, then, with the bloody Sacrifice which was to be consummated the next day on Calvary, He found in the institution of this sacrament a means of perpetuating it in a mystic manner on our altars, and of unceasingly offering Himself in person to His divine Father, being Himself both priest and victim at one and the same time; thus giving us in this holy oblation of infinite value, which is repeated every day, a copious and inexhaustible fountain of gifts and graces, rendering us capable of suitably discharging all our duties towards God, and of fully providing for all our needs, as will be explained at greater length when we come to speak of the fruits of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

How great, then, should be our anxiety and care to be present as often as possible at this precious and most august oblation of Himself offered to the Eternal Father, by His only-begotten Son, under the lowly appearances of bread and wine, and in a state of death that vividly represents His past condition on the Cross—an oblation which transports all heaven into admiration and ecstasy—an oblation the dearest and most acceptable to the Lord, and hence the most effectual in drawing down on us His divine benedictions. Assuredly, had we faith as large as a grain of mustard seed, we should not allow a single day to pass without hearing Mass; but how few there are who recognize its value and derive profit from it—who show themselves anxious to assist at it when not compelled by the precept of the Church—who, in fine, are grateful and thankful for the love shown by Jesus Christ in this sacrament! Well, the conclusion of all this is that Jesus Christ assuredly is not wanting on His part, but that His designs are frustrated by us. All the blame is ours if He is unable to accomplish the good that His loving Heart desires—if we are miserable it is because we wish to be so.

Such, then, are the principal ends Jesus Christ had in view in the institution of the Eucharist, and from these it will be evident that the greatest miracle to be admired in it is, as St. Thomas remarks, the excess of divine love—"the greatest of the miracles of Christ." How can the substance of bread and wine be changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ?—how can the real body of Christ exist within the narrow compass of a Host? To these questions the answer is easy: because God can do all things, because nothing is impossible to Him. But that God should love weak and contemptible creatures like us, with such intensity and transport, as to give Himself all to us in the Eucharist, to be our food, our companion, our abiding victim—this indeed is something to fill us with wonder and amazement—this indeed is something for which we can assign no reason.

Well, in the three ends already enumerated you have the three distinct ways in which Jesus Christ renders Himself the special object of our devotion: by remaining hidden in the tabernacle or by being exposed for public adoration; by uniting Himself to us in Holy Communion; and by offering Himself for us in the unbloody Sacrifice of our altars—three titles, whence arise grave and special obligations on our part.

Grateful, then, for the great gift which God has conferred on us in instituting this divine sacrament, let us use the advantage derived from the possession of it, by honouring it in every way, both by devout and frequent visits to the tabernacle, and by devout and frequent participation at the Eucharistic table, and by devout and frequent assistance at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

It will never be possible for our worship, love, and devotion towards Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament to grow less, if we only bear in mind, as indeed we should never fail to do, that the very Jesus who has become our companion, our food, and our victim during life has also willed to be our *Viaticum* at life's close; that He will approach our death-bed to accompany us in the great and inevitable journey from this life to the life to come. Well, shall He then come to us as our Father and Saviour, mindful of the devotion we have shown towards Him, and ready to repay us by sustaining and strengthening us amidst the dreadful straits of body and soul? or shall He come as Judge to punish our coldness, our carelessness, and our indifference towards Him, and make us feel in anticipation the condemnation that awaits us? What am I to reply for you, and what for myself? Just this: From the treatment we now manifest towards Him we can, with all probability, deduce the treatment we shall receive from Him then. Let us, then, think well on it, let us take precautions now while the time remains propitious and favourable to us; and let us always remember that He has no need of our homage, while we on the contrary stand in continual need of Him, both in life and especially at the critical hour of death.

Tenth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE EFFECTS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Having already explained the various loving ends on account of which Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, I now come to speak of it as the food of the soul in sacramental Communion, in reference to which we have three things to consider—the effects it produces in us ; the dispositions with which it should be received ; and the importance of communicating frequently.

And first as to the wonderful effects which Holy Communion produces in the soul that is properly prepared and disposed for its reception—as the Eucharist surpasses all the other sacraments in excellence and dignity, so also does it surpass them in virtue and efficacy. Hence the Church cries out in astonishment, using the beautiful words of St. Ambrose : " O sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His passion renewed, the soul filled with grace, and a pledge of the life to come given us."

Examining the subject in detail and with greater precision we see there are two principal effects of this sacrament—the one general and common to all the *sacraments of the Living ;* the other peculiar to and characteristic of this sacrament.

1. Its first effect is to increase sanctifying grace in us ; but the increase of grace produced by the Eucharist is, owing to the nature of this sacrament, far greater than that produced by the other sacraments. In fact the other sacraments are nothing more than channels by which the saving waters of grace are communicated to us, while in this sacrament we have the very source of grace ; the other sacraments operate by a virtue given them by Jesus Christ, but here it is Jesus Christ Himself who operates in person, feeds us, so to say, with His own very substance, lives and abides within us with all the treasures of His graces, and all the merits of His satisfaction, ever ready and willing to bestow them more and more profusely. As long as we voluntarily place no obstacle in the way of the infinite goodness and charity of a God who makes Himself our guest, such and so great is the increase of grace produced by this sacrament that in the words of the Church it may be called superabundance and fullness of grace ; " the soul is filled with grace "—

grace of light to the intellect, of charity to the heart, of strength to the will, of comfort and sweetness and joy to the spirit.

2. But it is impossible to speak of the general effect of the Eucharist without touching on its special and characteristic effect which is to nourish our souls. The special, specific, grace of this sacrament by which it is distinguished from all the other sacraments is, in fact, a grace of spiritual nutriment. Hence it is that Jesus Christ instituted it under the symbols of bread and wine—He even gives it the name of bread, of true food, of bread of life: *I am the bread of life*;[1] *My flesh is truly meat, My blood is truly drink*;[2] *I am the living bread*[3]—thus denoting that He is the heavenly food of our souls, just as bread is the food of the body, and that the same effects as are produced in the body by material bread are produced in the soul by the Eucharistic bread. Let us compare them.

The first effect of food—an effect from which all the rest depend—is to be intimately united to us and become one single thing with us. It not alone enters the stomach, but it becomes diffused through all the parts of the body—penetrates into flesh, and bone, and sinew, and becomes so much a part of our substance that it is no longer possible to separate the one from the other. Now, it is thus that Jesus Christ unites Himself corporeally and substantially to us in the Eucharist, so much so that we become one body and one soul with Him: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him.* Now, what is the result of this intimate and substantial union of Christ with us? The self-same effect as that produced in the body by material food which, as we know, maintains and sustains our life, which otherwise could not exist; invigorates, strengthens, and conducts it to perfect maturity. Not otherwise does the Eucharistic food maintain the soul's life which is grace; gives us vigour and strength; and raises us unceasingly to higher and higher degrees of holiness and perfection.

I have said that *it maintains the life of the soul*, in the same way as material bread maintains that of the body. There is, however, this difference, that the body, no matter how much it may be nourished, must one day lose its life; while the soul if it only eats worthily of this heavenly bread never loses its life, as Jesus Christ has assured us: *I am the living bread come down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever*[4]—words that cannot be applied to our temporal death, which is inevitable in the present order of things, and hence they can only be taken to refer to spiritual death, against which this sacrament has the power of preserving us permanently.

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[1] John vi. 48. [2] John vi. 56. [3] John vi. 51. [4] John vi. 51.

I say *permanently,* to denote the difference between the Eucharist and Penance, which also delivers us from death by transferring us from a state of sin to a state of grace. But the grace acquired by it, as St. Paul says, is a treasure which we carry in *earthen vessels,* and which cannot be long preserved unless we possess some other powerful succour against the many dangers that easily lead to its being lost. Now, this succour is afforded us by the Eucharist which supplies a remedy for our daily weaknesses, just as material bread repairs the daily loss of our bodily powers.

In what exactly do these weaknesses consist? In temptations by which we are assailed; in the passions which wage continual war against us; in the failings to which we are exposed—all of which enfeeble the soul and lead it imperceptibly to death.

Now, with regard to *temptations,* the Eucharist affords us wonderful strength to conquer them, and arms us against the devil and his suggestions. We rise from this table, says St. John Chrysostom, like lions breathing fire, made terrible to the very demons, who tremble to see us bear within us as our defence Him who completely triumphed over them and destroyed their empire. At His presence they fly, as did the Philistines of old when they saw the Ark of the Lord borne into the battle-field by the Jews: We are lost, they cried out in terror, behold the God of Israel coming to the succour of His people! This is also that table which the Psalmist says God keeps prepared against all those who afflict us: *Thou hast prepared a table before me, against them that afflict me.*[1] And therefore it is that the Church in times of persecution was so careful to arm the faithful with it, while they, strengthened by that divine food, unflinchingly mounted the scaffold to lay down their lives for the faith of Jesus Christ.

As for the *passions,* the second reason of our sins, if the Eucharist does not completely rid us of them, it at least moderates their violence and represses their unregulated inclinations. Hence St. Bernard said to the faithful of his day: If any one among you feels that the motions of anger, envy, and incontinence are no longer so strong within you as they were, let him simply attribute it to the body and blood of Jesus Christ received in Holy Communion. The passion of sense particularly, which of all the passions is the most violent and dangerous, finds a stern restraint in this sacrament which is specially ordained to heal that deadly plague called concupiscence and to diminish its fires. The immaculate flesh of Jesus Christ communicates its own qualities to our flesh; the blood of Jesus purifies ours which is defiled and corrupt through sin. Hence the Eucharist is called the *corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins,* [1] because it gives us a distaste for sensual pleasures and enables us to live an angelic life in the flesh just as if we were spirits without a body.

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[1] Ps. xxii. 5.

Finally, Communion directly cleanses us of our *daily faults.* By these I do not mean serious sins which are wiped away only in the sacrament of Penance, and which are never cancelled by the Eucharist, except accidentally; but I mean the lesser failings into which we daily fall. Regarding these, the Council of Trent assures us that this divine sacrament possesses the power to blot them out, if we receive it with hearts detached from affection to them—" It is the antidote by which we are freed from our daily faults."

It is thus, then, that the Eucharist preserves spiritual life in us, warding off and diminishing all that tends towards its destruction. Temptations become less frequent and more feeble; passions less active and more mortified; with less proclivity and propensity to evil. Justly, then, does the Council of Trent call it a great preservative from serious faults—" An antidote by which we are freed from daily failings, and preserved from mortal sins." But this is far from being all.

As material food not only maintains the life of the body, but invigorates and strengthens us and brings us to requisite perfection, so does the Eucharistic bread not only preserve us from the death of the soul, but makes us grow from virtue to virtue, from merit to merit, from holiness to holiness; and hence it was prefigured in that mysterious bread which the angel gave to Elias in the desert, refreshed with which the Prophet became sensible of the presence of such unusual strength and vigour in his frame that he was able, without any other food, to walk for forty continuous days and nights to the summit of Mount Horeb—a lively image of the vigour which the Eucharist instils into us, enabling us to walk steadily in the ways of the Lord and arrive safely along the thorny road of our exile to the holy mount of God,—the heavenly kingdom—ever enlivening our faith, animating our hope, inflaming our charity.

And all this without stint or limit, far different from the food of our body, which once we have reached a certain stature can afford us no further increase; while this sacrament ever renders the soul susceptible of further progress, and is therefore called the food of the mature, because not only those who are beginning, not only those who are advancing, but also those who are already perfect in the spiritual life, unceasingly acquire new grades of holiness and perfection by means of the Eucharist.

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[1] Zach. ix. 7

Furthermore, so great is the virtue of this divine food that it raises us above ourselves, and from being men of earth, it makes us spiritual men and men of heaven. And in fact, why did Jesus Christ, by the institution of this sacrament, make us sharers in His flesh, His blood, His uncreated Divinity? His principal object was to make us participators of His divine spirit and by means of the sacramental union to contract a more perfect spiritual union with us; without which the former would be of no avail: *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.*[1] It was His design to transform us completely into Himself, not indeed by changing our substance into His, but by changing our spirit into His own. Such, then, in short, is the great, the greatest effect of the Eucharist—it soothes us, imbues and fills us with the spirit of Jesus Christ—with His humility, His patience, His charity, with all His virtues; it enables us to live the same immaculate and divine life as He Himself lives: *He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me;*[2] hence he who communicates worthily can repeat with the Apostle: *I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,*[3] inasmuch as the spirit of Christ infused into us in the Eucharist, becomes, so to say, the principle and the soul of all our thoughts, affections, inclinations, and operations.

What more can be said to express the efficacy and power of this divine sacrament? Yet all this is included in the statement that He is the real, substantial food of our souls; *My flesh is truly food.* And to make the comparison between bread and bread as perfect as possible, I add that as material food possesses along with its other qualities that of gladdening and pleasing the taste of the person who eats it so also the Eucharist possesses the property of giving pleasure and sweetness to the soul, and infusing over it a celestial joy which is but a foretaste of Paradise: "Thou hast given them food from heaven, containing in itself every joy."

Hence arise the raptures and ecstasies which we read of in the lives of the saints on the reception of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist; hence also that mysterious unction of heavenly sweetness experienced daily by pious souls who devoutly unite themselves to Him.

These graces, however, are matters of experience rather than of reasoning or discourse—they cannot be known by those who recognize no other pleasures than those of the flesh and the senses.

But all has not yet been said. The Eucharist extends its influence not only over the present life, but also over the life to come; not only over the soul, but also over the body; since we receive therein a pledge, an earnest, of our eternal happiness, according to the words used by the Church in praise of this divine sacrament: "A pledge of the glory to come is given us."

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[1] John vi. 64.
[2] John vi. 58.
[3] Gal. ii. 20.

Now this glory to come comprises two things: the glory of the body in its resurrection, and the glory of the soul in the Beatific Vision—in the possession and loving enjoyment of God. That the Eucharist produces these two glories we know from the promise made by Jesus Christ: *He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day.*[1] *He hath everlasting life*—such is the glory of the soul, consisting in the Beatific Vision of God, which we begin to possess under the veils of the Eucharist until such time as we are enabled to contemplate Him face to face in Heaven. Moreover, being a sacrament of charity, love, and union with God, it gives us the right to a perfect union which is not consummated in this life, but only in the life to come—in our heavenly country: *And I shall raise him up in the last day*—such is the glory of the body in its resurrection.

Even though by God's decree the law that all should rise one day from the corruption of the tomb was not universal, still this distinct and special privilege would await those who during life had devoutly partaken of this heavenly food. For our mortal flesh, sanctified in the Eucharist by contact and union with the flesh of Christ, who is life itself, receives into itself a seed of immortality, a vivifying bud, which should make it rise from the ashes of the tomb and clothe it with the glorious endowments of the body of Christ.

Hence the Eucharist has been called by the holy Fathers, *the symbol of the resurrection, the medicine of immortality*, and they compare it to the tree of life—that life-giving plant, placed by God in the earthly paradise to keep the years of our first parents ever green and fresh. We lost that tree; but Jesus Christ has recompensed us, to our great advantage, by leaving us His body and blood to be the true food, preserving us from spiritual and eternal death and making us bloom once more to a better immortality.

From all this it will be easy to infer what care and solicitude we should have to fortify ourselves with this sacrament, especially in that hour when our frame is threatened with dissolution, when the soul is surrounded and attacked by pressing dangers, when we are in danger of losing that life that is so dear to us, and with that temporal life, our eternal life also. I refer, of course, to the case of grave illness and to the Blessed Eucharist received as the *Viaticum.*

Even if God and His Church had not commanded this under pain of damnation, would it not still be to our own special advantage to have Jesus Christ in person visit our bedside in that moment of bitterest anguish? To Him alone can we look for alleviation of our pain, patience, fortitude, resignation, sometimes even bodily health; for it not unfrequently happens that we see the health of the body revive along with that of the soul, and illness disappear at the sight of the heavenly Physician.

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[1] John vi. 55.

From Him, too, comes the strength to reject the temptations ot the demons that are then more numerous than ever. The adversary is strong and the battle fierce, while we are weaker than ever; but Jesus Christ, received in the Blessed Eucharist with the proper dispositions, becomes our shield and defence: *The Lord is my helper, and I will despise my enemies.*[1]

From Him, finally, is derived final perseverance, of which the Eucharist cannot but be a pledge, precisely because it is a pledge of eternal life; hence we pass from time to eternity carrying an earnest of Paradise in our breasts.

Such, beyond doubt, are the advantages of Holy Communion under the form of the *Viaticum*—it serves as a sure and certain guide on that great and final journey from this life to eternity.

How does it happen, then, that there is so often found such reluctance, and even alarm, in the sick at the bare mention of the Viaticum, as if it were a visit of evil omen? The truth is, that this happens only in the case of those who, during life, have little affection for the sacraments. Not so good Catholics, who have been accustomed to receive the Blessed Sacrament frequently. At the first sign of serious illness they long for and request it anxiously; they welcome it into their room with lively joy; they receive it with tender devotion; and, united with it, even in the midst of all their pains and agonies, they feel their hearts inundated with a flood of heavenly consolation—and thus they either are restored to health or, like victims already prepared, they await death, intrepid and assured: *Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me.*[2]

Do we desire to be in the number of these fortunate souls? Well, if so, like them, we must ever keep the eye of faith fixed on those things which must of necessity come one day; we must often and fervently beseech Jesus Christ to make us worthy to receive Him in that last extremity; and finally we must, from this very moment, even though compelled by no necessity of illness or death, show ourselves anxious and hungry for this divine food.

Such, then, are the priceless effects of the Eucharist—effects which do not cease to be such as I have said, and much more than I have said, even though frequently not realized in practice. But, you will ask, how is it possible to conciliate such wonderful efficacy and virtue with such sterility and scarceness of fruit as is often observed in those who receive it ?

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[1] Ps. cxvii. 7.

[2] Ps. xxii. 4.

In the first place, I reply that the effects of the sacrament are not always outwardly visible. What happens in the order of nature happens in the order of grace. Just as in the case of the body we grow in size imperceptibly and unconsciously, so is it in like manner with regard to the soul—one can grow, and often actually does grow, in grace, in fervour, in devotion, and in all the other Christian virtues without any signs of progress being manifested for some time. Let this be a comfort to those pious souls who, in the Blessed Eucharist, seek God with sincerity, and nevertheless seem to themselves to derive no fruit therefrom. Assuredly it is no small fruit to have habitually avoided all grave sin, fled all voluntary venial sin, and cherished the lowly sentiments they entertain about themselves.

But with regard to the greater part of Catholics, the fact that they do not feel any effects resulting from the Blessed Eucharist must be ascribed to the bad use they make of it, or their negligence in approaching it.

The bad use they make of it. If you communicate out of habit or custom, with little devotion and preparation, or with heart encumbered with vicious inclinations, what wonder should there be that you do not carry away even one drop of that saving virtue contained in the Blessed Eucharist ? The fault is not in the food, but in the system—in your own bad dispositions.

I have also said *from negligence in approaching it*, because the salutary result of food is always in proportion to the use made of it. Let a food be ever so nutritious and substantial, its virtue surely does not last for ever. Does not food by its very nature demand that it should be frequently used ? And if Jesus Christ is the food and nourishment of our souls, why do we stand aloof and allow weeks and months to pass, and merely bring ourselves to receive Him at Easter ? How is it possible to experience sensibly and lastingly the effects of a food received thus rarely ? But I shall take occasion to return to the importance of frequent Communion later on.

To conclude, let us approach frequently and with proper dispositions to the reception of this sacrament, shaking off as far as possible that lazy and senseless tepidity which is so common. Doing thus we shall find by experience how powerful is the virtue of the Eucharist to keep us from sin, heal the wounds of our souls, cherish piety, and establish and confirm us therein even more and more.

Eleventh Instruction on the Sacraments

DISPOSITIONS REQUISITE FOR HOLY COMMUNION

HAVING already explained what the Eucharist is, why it was instituted, and what are its effects, it is now necessary to speak of the dispositions with which it should be received. Before doing so, however, let us dwell for a moment on the obligation that binds us to receive this sacrament. It is not, indeed, necessary to salvation in the sense that it is absolutely necessary; for children who die after Baptism are saved without Communion, and even adults can be saved if they die without this sacrament through no fault of their own. *Through no fault of their own.* From this you will infer that the sacrament is necessary as a matter of precept—that is to say, a person who can receive it, but who neglects to do so, becomes under certain circumstances guilty of a grave sin.

This precept is clearly and formally laid down in the words of our Lord: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you* [1]—words involving a definite obligation, even though all the circumstances regarding the time in which we are to approach Holy Communion are not here particularized.

Writers on sacred subjects are all agreed that the divine law obliges us to receive the Blessed Eucharist when we are *in danger of death;* if that precept ever holds, assuredly is it in the time of our greatest need. Now, when is there such need as during the sorest straits of both soul and body?—of the body, afflicted, languishing, oppressed by disease and pain; of the soul, attacked on all sides, and torn by remorse, anguish, and terror. Both for one and for the other assuredly is there urgent need of a heavenly medicine, a sovereign relief; and for this whither can we turn if not to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament?

It is also agreed that as well as in danger of death the precept also binds us at various other times during the course of our lives. And how can we doubt it? If Christ, as we have seen, instituted this sacrament as the food of our souls it is not really so if only very rarely availed of. The very nature and notion of food involves the need of frequent use thereof—a use readily availed of by good, fervent, and well-instructed Catholics, without any compulsion whatever.

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[1] John vi. 54.

But since, as is shown by experience, this law would be disregarded by many were the determination of the time within which it should be obeyed left to each one's own free will, the Church has, on the basis of that law, determined the time, and has commanded that all the faithful as soon as they are capable of *discerning the body of the Lord* should communicate at least once a year, that is, at Easter. On this point we shall have more to say when we come to speak of the precepts of the Church.

Taking it for granted, then, that we are to communicate, whether in fulfilment of the precept, or through private devotion, the question arises as to what are the dispositions demanded in us? They are of two kinds—some regard the body, and others the soul; and of each of these two, some are indispensably necessary while others are simply right and becoming.

As to the dispositions of the body, we need not dwell on them at any length. Before communicating we must, in the first place, be fasting with that kind of fast which is known as *natural*—and which, unlike the *ecclesiastical* fast, is broken by the smallest particle of food. From midnight, then, up to the actual moment of Communion, nothing is to be swallowed by way of food or drink or medicine—such is the *natural fast.*

On this point, however, excessive scrupulosity should be avoided. According to the ordinary received teaching, neither the fragments of food that remain between the teeth, nor a drop of water which should accidentally be swallowed while washing the mouth or face, nor the blood that should issue from the teeth or gums or any other part of the mouth, would break the fast so far as to hinder Communion.

The fast is not, indeed, of divine precept, for we know that Jesus Christ administered Communion to the Apostles after they had eaten of the paschal lamb; but the Church demands it, and rightly so, as a mark of the honour and reverence due to the body of our Lord, which might otherwise be easily profaned in various ways if each one were allowed to eat and drink freely previous to Communion.

Nevertheless, the precept binds under pain of grave sin, and this legislation must date back almost to the times of the Apostles, since we find no trace of its origin in subsequent centuries, and hence it is so respected by the Church that it is not dispensed unless in the few cases in which it comes into conflict with some more urgent precept; thus, for instance, if the Sacrifice of the Mass should happen to be interrupted by the sudden illness or death of the celebrant after the consecration, the Sacrifice in this case should be completed even by a priest who is not fasting, provided no priest still fasting is available. The reason is that the integrity of the Sacrifice is prescribed by God.

In like manner, a person who is not fasting can communicate in case of grave and dangerous illness, because at such time the obligation not to leave this life without being fortified by the succour that is derived from the Blessed Eucharist prevails over the obligation to receive Holy Communion fasting.

Besides fasting, there are certain other dispositions which, while not so necessary, are yet becoming. These are cleanliness, neatness, and general signs of exterior reverence and respect.

And, in fact, the reception of Holy Communion is a much more serious and important function than that of being presented before some great personage of this world, or before the most select assembly of men. Now the first and most elementary ideas of politeness and courtesy forbid us to appear before a great personage or a respectable assembly without being suitably attired, or in torn and wretched clothes, with dirty and unpolished boots, with hair dishevelled and unkempt, with soiled hands and face, or with a general air of levity, carelessness, and want of recollection. How, then, should we dare to present ourselves in a similar shape to receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament—an action which assuredly demands far more decorum, and signs of reverence and honour? Indeed, such cannot happen unless we completely lose sight of what we are about to do.

Were I speaking to a congregation of women, this would be the place to notice another kind of unbecoming behaviour of a far more serious character, namely, vanity and want of modesty. If immodesty is always blameworthy, even in the midst of the world, will it not be much more improper and ugly at the very table of the Lord? How can one dare to present oneself to receive Jesus Christ, all humbled as He is for us and hidden under the accidents of bread, with a display of pomp and a mode of dress that outsteps the limits of modesty? What more repulsive or hateful object could there be in the sight of God than this?

It is enough for me to have drawn attention to this in order that the fathers and husbands here present will use the authority they possess to hinder any such unbecoming conduct in their wives and daughters. At the very least, on the occasion of Holy Communion let them cast aside the mania for appearance and display which is always attended with danger to decency and modesty.

So much for the dispositions of the body.

Now as to what is more important still, namely, the inward and immediate preparation of the soul. Yes, our principal care should be to strive to acquire those dispositions which go to render the soul a worthy dwelling-place of our divine Guest, or to speak more correctly as little unworthy as possible. When we reflect that a lowly creature is going to receive his God, his Creator, the sovereign Lord of the universe, in whose hands is our lot both temporal and eternal; that he is going to receive Him within himself, not merely in his own house, but into his heart—into the very innermost recess of his soul; that he is going to receive Him, effecting thereby the closest and most ineffable union with Him; when we think on all this, I repeat, can any preparation of ours ever seem excessive, or more than is demanded? And if our preparation can never be in proportion to the infinite greatness of that God who descends into us, ought it not at the very least be all that is attainable by our powers assisted by divine grace? God, indeed, well knows how to excuse the infirmity and weakness of our nature, but He will certainly not be indulgent towards the defects arising from culpable negligence.

What, then, should be that preparation? It is not difficult to discover it. Jesus Christ deigned to institute the sacrament of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine precisely in order that from the dispositions which are requisite to partake advantageously of food and drink, we should be able to infer the dispositions required in us for the worthy and profitable reception of this spiritual food.

Now, for material food to produce any effect, it is first of all necessary that the person to eat it be alive, since food has no power to give life to the dead, but only to preserve life in the living. In the second place, to produce its effects in all their fullness the person eating it must be in a satisfactory state of health, for otherwise even the most wholesome food becomes useless or even harmful.

Here, then, making due allowances, we find outlined (1) the dispositions necessary to receive Holy Communion worthily, and these are freedom from grave sin, purity of conscience, the state of grace—in a word, *life of the soul;* and (2) the dispositions requisite to enable us to receive Holy Communion very worthily and very profitably, and these dispositions are true piety, fervent devotion, right intention, a sincere desire to grow in the grace of God and amend our faults—in a word, *health of the soul.* Life of the soul is necessary to make a good Communion—health of the soul to make a very good Communion; life of the soul is necessary to avoid making a bad or sacrilegious Communion—health of the soul to avoid a tepid and less fruitful Communion; the first is necessary to receive the Lord's body worthily—the second is necessary to receive it with abundant fruit.

The first disposition requisite, then, is the spiritual life of the soul which is nothing else than sanctifying grace. It is that nuptial garment referred to in the Gospel, without which it is not permissible to sit down to the Eucharistic banquet. Now, sanctifying grace is absolutely incompatible with the state of mortal sin; and hence if we are conscious of mortal sin we must purify ourselves properly from that contagion before going to Holy Communion.

That this is the first and most essential preparation for Holy Communion, the Church, following the words of St. Paul, has always taught: *But let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice* [1]—words which convey no mere counsel, but a strict command. *Let a man prove himself*—that is, let each one interrogate his own conscience; let him see, search, examine what it is in the sight of God, and whether it possesses the requisite purity. If not, then let him, as the Council of Trent lays down, procure that purity of conscience by means of the sacrament of Penance.

By means of the sacrament of Penance. Do not imagine you can do without that sacrament and supply its place by an act of contrition. That contrition without confession does not suffice was clearly laid down by the Council of Trent; and to deprive men's indolence or malice of the excuse that might be made for eluding confession, by constituting themselves their own judges and relying on a simple act of contrition even at the risk of profaning the sacrament, the Council expressly declares and defines that "no one conscious of having mortal sin on his soul, no matter how contrite he may be, is to dare approach Holy Communion without previous sacramental confession"—a law that not only binds lay people, but priests who are preparing to celebrate Mass.

Confession, then, comes first of all and indispensably—not any kind of confession at all, but a good and well-prepared confession—a confession which must not be a matter of mere custom, without any intention of leading a better life, without any sorrow for sin committed, without any true resolution to avoid it for the future.

No, I repeat, any kind of confession at all will not suffice, but it must be prepared and made in such a way as to leave no reasonable room for remorse, and to enable us to form a prudent judgment that we have been re-established in the grace of God.

A state of grace, then, is necessary for the worthy reception of Holy Communion, and a person who receives Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin is guilty of a very serious crime. On that crime, which we call sacrilegious Communion, I intend to speak at some length in our next instruction.

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 28.

Twelfth Instruction on the Sacraments

ENORMITY OF A SACRILEGIOUS COMMUNION

THE first and most essential disposition for Holy Communion, as I pointed out in our last instruction, is the state of grace—purity of conscience—excluding all guilt of mortal sin. Without this disposition the Communion would be nothing more or less than a sacrilege. Before going any further, then, it will be necessary to examine and ponder deeply on two things of the utmost importance: (1) The enormity of a sacrilegious Communion; and (2) the danger of committing this enormity.

1. As for the first point, I find in St. Paul two very strong expressions which bring vividly before the eyes the dreadful nature of this sin—expressions well calculated to instil terror into anyone who has even a spark of faith.

In the first place he says that whoever communicates unworthily *is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*[1] The essential holiness of Jesus Christ, as proposed to us by our faith, should readily make clear to us the direct intrinsic opposition between Him and sin. Christ and sin are two terms so mutually opposed and incompatible that they cannot be united without becoming an object of horror and abomination in the sight of God. What union, asks St. Paul, what alliance can there be between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial? *What fellowship hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?*[2] Behold here a sin, the intrinsic malice of which is enormous.

In the second place the same Apostle adds: *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.*[3] Behold here a sin terrible in its consequences. Let us thoroughly penetrate these two truths in order to derive thence a salutary horror of this crime.

The monstrous alliance alluded to is only too well realized in us if we approach the holy table with a conscience stained by mortal sin and in possession of the devil. Is it not true that the nature and property of this sacrament is to introduce Jesus Christ personally into us, unite Him intimately to us, incorporate Him with us? Now, to receive Him in a state of mortal sin, what else is it than to offer Him a habitation the most abominable, the most unworthy of Him, and to force Him in spite of Himself to dwell with sin and live with the demon, His great, implacable enemy ? Now, what crime can be imagined more abominable than this ? If every sinner despises God when he tramples on His laws and His will, what will be said of the man who dishonours Him directly in His person ? If the profaner of a holy and consecrated object commits a very grave sin, what will be said of the man who not only profanes the sacred vessels, the ciborium, relics, altars, but the very Holy of holies, the body and blood of the Lord ? Finally, if each sinner is truly guilty of the death of Jesus Christ, since by sin he revives the impious cause of that death, what should be said of the man who nails Him within his own breast to a far more bitter cross than that of Calvary ?

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 27. [2] 2 Cor. vi. 14. [3] 1 Cor. ix. 29.

Yes, the words of St. Paul : *He is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, show us that in this sin there is a malice nothing short of *Deicide.* And, in fact, does not being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord mean exactly the same as putting Him to death ? This is the meaning given it by the Church : " He shall be punished as if he had murdered Christ." It is in this sense also that the Fathers understood it, for they compare the crime of an unworthy Communion to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ by the Jews, and they discover in it a complexity of circumstances rendering it even more grave. For, after all, the Jews crucified Jesus Christ without knowing Him, whereas if they had known Him, as St. Paul remarks, they would not have crucified Him. They crucified Him in a body that was still mortal and passible ; and in crucifying Him they unconsciously accomplished the will of the Father who willed to derive the salvation of the world and the greater glory of Christ from that crucifixion.

The sacrilegious communicants, on the other hand, raise up within themselves a kind of cross for Jesus Christ, even now when He reigns glorious in heaven, and in spite of the fact that they recognize and adore Him as their true God ; a cross not of salvation, but of perdition to themselves ; a cross not of honour to Jesus Christ, but injurious, ignominious, insulting to Him—and all this in the very moment in which Jesus Christ shows them the deepest token of love, and holds out to them, in His infinite tenderness, a gift of such surpassing glory as to fill heaven, and we may almost say, hell itself, with astonishment —in that very moment in which Jesus Christ enters into their hearts to pour forth over them the treasures of His graces, nay gives them His own very Self. O what an excess of guilt, of ingratitude, of perfidy, of betrayal ! Who can ever explain it ? Now all this is comprised in St. Paul's sentence: *He is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord;* nor is there any fear of this being a mere exaggeration, since it is a truth declared by God Himself who cannot deceive; and hence we must accept it and believe it, even though we do not understand how it happens.

But if the enormity of this sin is such and so great, what are its consequences? Baneful, indeed, are they and terrible. St. Paul sums them up in these words: *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.*

We cannot read, without deep emotion, that passage in ecclesiastical history wherein is related the dread manner in which the heresiarch Pyrrhus was condemned in the Lateran Council (649). During the sitting of this Council, while the divine Sacrifice was being offered up according to custom, the Pontiff had the consecrated chalice carried to the throne, and dipping his pen in the Redeemer's blood—that very blood by which the world was redeemed and saved—he wrote the excommunication and condemnation of the unhappy heresiarch. The Fathers of the Council shuddered at the sight, and all the bystanders shook with terror.

More horrible by far is the fate of him who communicates unworthily. It is not merely on paper that his condemnation is written in the blood of the Redeemer—that blood is printed on his own soul. He swallows that blood, he absorbs it, he incorporates it with himself, in such a way as to make it part of himself, like food and drink in the system; and—*he eats and drinks judgment to himself.* Just as poison on being swallowed spreads throughout the body with all its deadly qualities, and once these have seized on the body, it is difficult indeed to dislodge them; in like manner the Eucharistic food received unworthily becomes a poison which spreads its ravages all round, is converted into our substance and into our blood in such a way that it is hardly possible to separate them. What a strange and mournful picture is this! Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, who is the fountain of benediction and grace, life's heavenly food, the soul's comfort and delight, the pledge, and earnest, and anticipation of bliss unending, changed into a fatal poison, a deadly food, a thing of ruin, a sign and brand of reprobation! For *he eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.* But that is not all.

The malediction which he who is guilty of a sacrilegious Communion swallows, and which he bears within him graven deeply in his vitals, cannot fail to act banefully both on soul and body. Yes, even on the body in the shape of weakness, infirmity, or premature death. Hence, continues the same Apostle, if many are ill, weak, feeble, and even prematurely struck by sudden death (which is so frequent in our days), it is because in this sacrament of life they eat to their own condemnation: *Therefore are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep.*[1]

Now if these external and corporal punishments are not realized always and in all persons, the interior and spiritual chastisements are always and everywhere verified, in a manner less sensible, it is true, but yet more terrible—spiritual blindness, abandonment of God, complete and total subjection to the devil—all of which hurry along the soul from sin to sin, from excess to excess, and in the end lead to final impenitence. Such are the deplorable effects of the *judgment* that is eaten by an unworthy Communion.

Think on Judas, the first example of this crime, and the first example also of the dread punishment meted out to it by divine justice. Though he was a miser, evil-disposed, and uncharitable; though he had in several ways already allowed the demon to enter his heart; yet he was never fully and completely possessed by him until he had dared to make an unworthy Communion: *And after the morsel, Satan entered into him.*[2] Then it was that the devil blinded him; led him to execute the hateful designs he had conceived of selling his divine Master, but which up till then he had not carried into effect, owing to a glimmer of conscience and light still remaining; drove him all at once to agree with the enemies of Jesus Christ as to the price of his infamous betrayal; and finally tempted him remorselessly to that unhappy end known to all, of hanging himself in despair.

Oh, all you who are tempted to make a bad Communion, remember this example; and if anyone amongst us should be tempted to approach the holy table unworthily, should he not feel his feet tottering under him, and his very vitals congealed!

I do not mean to imply by all this that the crime in question is unpardonable or irreparable, or that he who is conscious of having been guilty of it, should, like Judas, abandon himself to despair. No—amongst the very persons who crucified the Redeemer on Golgotha, heaping on His sacred Person every kind of injury and outrage, we know there were some who truly repented and found grace and salvation in the very blood they had unworthily shed. On the same terms, then,—on the condition of a sincere repentance—there is hope of pardon and salvation for those also who have renewed the perfidy of the executioners. The conclusion to be drawn from all that has been thus far said is, that we can never fear the crime of a sacrilegious Communion too much, nor weep and regret it too bitterly before God, when once it has been committed.

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 30.

[2] John xiii. 27.

2. But you may say your conscience does not reproach you with this crime, because, you say, you believe you are in a state of grace every time you go to Holy Communion. Now this brings me to the second point, regarding which it is necessary to be correctly instructed. All that I have said on the enormity of a sacrilegious Communion would be quite useless, and would produce not the smallest fear in you, if I did not further examine a pretext under the shadow of which many persuade themselves that they are free from this crime, and if along with pointing out its enormity I did not also draw attention to the danger and the *facility* of committing it.

I do not wish to disturb your minds needlessly, but only to inspire you with just self-diffidence, when I ask you to bear in mind that there are two classes of persons who fall into this sin. The first are they who, though perfectly conscious of being in mortal sin either because they have not confessed their sins at all or because they have concealed some sin, nevertheless through human respect, or for some other vain motive, shamelessly approach the holy table. They are certainly all the more guilty since they act with full malice and deliberation; but these abandoned souls—these hearts of stone—are few. The second are those who, on insufficient grounds, persuade themselves they are in the grace of God, and confidently approach Holy Communion. These are far more numerous—they are, like the first class, sacrilegious communicants; less guilty than those, perhaps, but still guilty of a real sacrilege, because their ignorance, being as it is voluntary and culpable, does not lessen the fact that they really and consciously approach Holy Communion without being in the state of grace.

Now, who are they? They are those whose previous confessions have been defective. For, I ask: Are all confessions good, salutary, and holy? Are they each and all sufficient to restore us to the grace of God, and hence preserve us from a sacrilegious Communion? No, by no means. Some confessions are bad, because a mortal sin has been wilfully concealed. But an accurate account of our sins is not enough for a good confession—the accusation of our sins must be accompanied by real sorrow for those sins and by a firm purpose of satisfying for them and amending our lives. Before approaching the holy table you must be sure that there are not still found within your heart feelings of hatred only half repressed; impure passions burning steadily; evil attachments and associations still undissolved, or only half dissolved; proximate occasions not abandoned, or abandoned only with the secret intention of resuming them later on; acts of restitution to be made and promised to be made, yet never carried out; grave faults and defects of which you accuse yourselves through habit and routine, but which remain ever the same; and so on to the end.

And if, even after an exact confession of your sins, you find that such is your condition—that you have had no true contrition and no real purpose of amendment—do you consider that you are fit to approach Holy Communion? Or rather do you not consider that to neglect the voice of conscience in the matter is a wilful closing of your eyes to the light? And if you do approach Holy Communion in this condition of soul, what kind of Communion do you consider yours to be? Nay, must you not admit that your confession is only a mere excuse to lull your conscience to sleep—not a serious attempt to restore the grace of God to your souls? And if this is so is not the Communion that follows it a bad and sacrilegious Communion?

But, you may say: I am in good faith; I believe I am in the state of grace when I approach Holy Communion; and does not good faith suffice to preserve me from a sacrilegious Communion? Yes, certainly, provided it is genuine; but this is not genuine good faith; it is a groundless and presumptuous confidence—a voluntary, culpable error—a gross illusion which could not exist if you had made that sincere, strict, and loyal self-examination which the Apostle demands: *Let a man prove himself, and thus let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice.*

This, then, is what I am anxious should be borne in mind by those who do not frequent the sacraments, and whose life is marked with much irregularity. I know how great is the efficacy of a good confession in reconciling us to God; but I also know how few indeed are those who, living habitually in sin and remaining in this state up to the very day of their Communion, go through confession properly, and are penetrated with that salutary compunction which is all-effective, and smoothes all difficulties; and hence those persons do indeed approach the holy table, confessed it is true, but not justified. Alas! on this head the number of unworthy Communions is far greater than is imagined.

For the love of God and for our own sake, let us reflect on our Communions. The bread we receive is no ordinary bread, and we risk our all in receiving it badly. Let us examine ourselves severely, let us make our confessions as exactly and as fervently as we should like to do when preparing for death; be very sure that less purity is not necessary to receive Jesus Christ than to appear before the tribunal of God. This one reflection should suffice to make us prepare in such a way as never to expose ourselves to the danger of a sacrilegious Communion.

On the other hand, I am far from desiring to see you fall into an opposite error, which would be that of not communicating at all, on the pretext of desiring to avoid sacrilege. There are several who voluntarily remain away under the pretext of their unworthiness, and who even wish to derive merit from their abstention, as if it were an act of respect and reverence to God. But they ought to know that as long as they do not try to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way, their respect is false, and they transgress God's precept in another way.

Their respect is false. Grave sins are assuredly an obstacle to Holy Communion, but an obstacle which can be removed. If the sins you have committed keep you back, repent of them, detest them, blot them out by a good confession, and the obstacle disappears. But if you refuse to remove the obstacle, how pretend that respect keeps you back ? It simply means that you are more attached to your sins than to the body and blood of Jesus Christ—that you prefer to remain without Him, rather than without your sins. And is this respect ? No, it is not respect—it is blindness, it is hatred of your own soul, it is a baneful attachment to sin.

They transgress God's precept in another way. For it is certain that we are bound to receive Holy Communion worthily on certain occasions—at Easter, for instance ; and consequently we are bound to remove the obstacles that stand in the way. Now, if we do not remove these obstacles it is clear that we thereby offend against the precepts that binds us to receive Holy Communion at Easter, and thus our pretended respect for Holy Communion leads us to break the precept that regulates the reception of Holy Communion.

Nevertheless, in preparing for Holy Communion, it would be little indeed to content ourselves with exemption from mortal sin. We should not only strive, when communicating, to avoid sacrilege, but also to make a very good and a very fruitful Communion. For this, something more than the bare state of grace—the mere exemption from mortal sin—is required. And what is that ? We shall see in our next instruction.

Thirteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

DISPOSITIONS FOR FERVENT* COMMUNION

WHEN we wish to approach Holy Communion we should not merely confine ourselves to avoiding the profanation of the Sacrament, but we should also make it our aim to honour it; it is not enough to avoid the crime of a sacrilegious Communion—it is also requisite that we should make a holy and fruitful Communion.

To avoid profaning this sacrament it is, as we have seen, enough to be in the state of grace—a state which excludes the presence of all grave sin in the soul. This is the first disposition essentially requisite to avoid staining our souls with the guilt of sacrilege. But to honour the Blessed Eucharist, and derive therefrom all the precious fruits which it is destined to produce, there is also required of us a true spirit of piety, or fervour of devotion, and this is the second disposition which now remains to be explained—a disposition that is, at the very least, highly desirable, and is even necessary towards the complete and perfect effect of the sacrament.

And in fact, even though conscience has nothing serious to reproach us with, yet if we approach the holy table with little devotion, with tepidity, with languor, with a heart seared by habitual defects, and through custom rather than from a desire to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ—to be seen by others rather than to please God—in a word, without lively faith and ardent charity, we do not, it is true, commit a sacrilege, but we derive less fruit from Communion; for while we do not profane the Lord's body positively by a conscience stained with grave sin, yet we have not that just discernment which it merits, thereby rendering ourselves less pleasing to God—*not discerning the body of the Lord.*

In what, then, does this spirit of piety and fervent devotion consist? In two things—in purifying the soul from affection to sin, and in adorning it with holy virtues.

1. First of all in purifying the soul, and in resolving to free it as far as possible from all affection towards every sort of sin.

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* See Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, Dec. 20, 1905, on Daily Communion, p. 163 supra. It should be noted that the dispositions referred to in the text are not those on which the recent Decree has any bearing, but are on a far different level.

There is no question here of those venial faults committed without premeditation and through mere human frailty, and from which even the holiest souls are not exempt. It cannot properly be said that an affection exists towards these, and hence they are not an obstacle in the way of a copiously fruitful Communion.

Nor is there precisely any question of those venial faults which are committed with a certain amount of advertence, which arise from weakness and habit rather than from full and perfect will, and the commission of which is attended by sincere sorrow. Properly speaking no affection can be said to be retained towards such faults, while on the other hand the Eucharist is destined to diminish their number and hinder consent to them.

But the question does concern those venial faults which are committed voluntarily and with full reflection, and which, for some souls, constitute the whole tone and colour of their lives and the habitual and invariable matter of their confessions, and which they accuse themselves of without the least intention to amend or avoid them. Thus; *With regard to God*, such sins would be habitual and voluntary tepidity and sloth in matters of piety, and negligence in the discharge of the duties of our state—slight, if you will, but perfectly voluntary, and multiplied beyond measure. *In reference to our neighbour*, want of charity, patience, toleration—rancour, jealousy, coldness, contempt, murmuring—light, if you will, but continual—an habitual spirit of contradiction, criticism, complaint, disruption of peace and charity. *In regard to ourselves*, excessive attachment to riches, vanities, pleasures, friendships—not dishonest, if you will, but too tender and intense—continued dissipation, impatience in sufferings, and want of resignation, little or no abnegation of self or of one's own will, and so on. Such are the faults which are multiplied daily above the number of the hairs of our heads, and for which we do really cherish some affection; and it is faults such as these that in great part hinder the perfect fruit of Communion as long as we carry them with us to the holy table without any feeling of sorrow for them, and as long as we continue to remain attached to them in our hearts.

Now judge whether it is becoming that a divine Guest should be lodged in a heart stained by so many vicious affections, inclined to so many imperfections, soiled with so many venial sins that have never been amended and are freely committed. True, indeed, these sins do not destroy charity and sanctifying grace, but they are displeasing to God, who is the God of purity and essentially an enemy to every kind of sin; and hence they greatly diminish the correspondence required of us and stand in the way of the fullness of that tender and generous love with which Jesus Christ desires to unite Himself to us in the Eucharist. And, indeed, where was there ever a master, no matter how liberally inclined, who is willing to heap his favours and graces on that servant who does not correspond to his affection and who shows himself careless and negligent in much that concerns his service ?

It is highly expedient, then, to purify our souls thoroughly from every trace of vicious affection. This is what Jesus Christ taught us by His wonderful example, says the Roman Catechism following on the teaching of the Fathers. Though the Apostles were clean, yet before giving them Holy Communion He washed their feet, thus showing us, by this mysterious action, the extreme cleanliness and purity with which it is desirable to approach the holy table—a purity which should exclude not only all mortal sins, but even all deliberate affection for venial sins which were precisely prefigured in that dust attached to the feet of the Apostles.

Now if this disposition of detachment from all affection towards sin is expedient in him who desires to communicate with great fruit even one single time, much more is it expedient in the case of those who approach Holy Communion frequently. It is certainly far from edifying to see persons whose life is, so to say, made up of continual Communions, derive no solid fruit therefrom, or display no advance in fervour and solid piety. Now, whence arises this great inconsistency ? It arises precisely from all the venial faults which are committed with full advertence, which are allowed to remain unamended, and which are carried with us to the holy table.

That which we often observe to happen in the body takes place in the soul. Thus we sometimes see persons who, though they live on choice, excellent, and substantial food, nevertheless are thin, pale, weak, delicate, or ill, owing to the unhealthy or harmful acids abounding in their bodies and hindering digestion. Thus it is with many souls. Although they frequently approach Holy Communion, and frequently feed on this divine food, which of its nature is most substantial, they nevertheless continue languid, weak, and exhausted ; nor do they ever raise themselves an inch above the earth, in consequence of the many venial faults, attachments, inclinations, and worldly occupations which they will not renounce, and which impede the fruit intended for them by Jesus Christ.

2. But to receive Jesus Christ with the greatest fervour and piety it is not enough to purify the soul from all sinful affections ; it is also expedient to adorn the soul with virtue. In this respect it will be well to distinguish the time immediately preceding, from that subsequent to, Communion.

(*a*) Before Communion we should open the eyes of the soul, penetrate with lively faith into that sacramental cloud which hides Jesus Christ from our bodily gaze, and contemplate and consider Him under all aspects such as He really is—God of infinite majesty and grandeur, God of infinite purity and holiness, God of infinite goodness and clemency; our Saviour, our Spouse, the Physician of our souls; burning with desire to unite Himself to us, load us with His gifts, and make us one with Himself. From living and ardent faith like this will spring not only exterior respect, modesty, and recollection, but also and by a natural conesquence, all the internal acts which should form part of a proximate preparation for Holy Communion, such as:—

Acts of humble adoration, and of profound self-annihilation—reflecting on the one hand on His sovereign grandeur, and on the other on our lowliness and nothingness.

Acts of holy and salutary fear—contemplating His holiness on the one hand, and our own malice, corruption, and unworthiness on the other. This fear will excite within us a contrition ever more and more heartfelt and intense which will in the end purify our souls, and destroy therein every unbecoming affection.

Acts of confidence and of ardent desire of approaching Him—remembering on the one hand our own poverty and need, and on the other hand the goodness of Jesus Christ, the source of all good, in inviting us and pressing us to go to Him: *Come to Me, all you that labour and are burthened, and I will refresh you.*[1]

And above all, *acts of perfect love* of that God who in this sacrament of love gives Himself entirely to us, ardently desiring to unite our hearts to His with the sweet and powerful chains of the tenderest charity, and to transform us into Himself.

From the combination and union of all these affections comes that holy fervour with which we should strive to be filled, inflamed, consumed, when we approach the sacred table.

Do not imagine that this is too much to expect. Let us remember the profound veneration with which the Magi approached Him, only to recognize and adore Him in the manger; the faith of the woman suffering from an issue of blood, who only desired to touch the hem of His garment; the humility of the centurion, who considered himself unworthy to receive Him into his house; the ardent affection with which Mary Magdalene, prostrate at His feet, kissed them and washed them with her tears. It is the same Jesus who comes in person to take up His dwelling within us.

No. Our dispositions cannot be too perfect. Nay, there should even be the purity of the angels and the ardour of the Seraphim to approach the holy table—and even that would be all too little. No matter how much we do to prepare, we can never do too much. And hence it is that at the moment of receiving the sacred Host, we should pour forth a short but fervent prayer beseeching Jesus Christ to supply, by His grace, for all our defects, and to pour into our hearts the requisite dispositions—recognizing that no matter how carefully we may have prepared, we are always infinitely unworthy of so great a gift.

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[1] Matt. xi. 28.

(*b*) *After Communion.* But the fruit of the Eucharist depends largely on the good use of the time immediately following Communion. It is an all-important moment for us—a most precious and acceptable time—a time that would be an object of envy to the angels of Paradise were they capable of any such feeling. For, coming away from the altar with the sacramental species within our breasts, we carry with us the true, real, corporeal presence of Jesus Christ; our body is the true tabernacle of the living God, and we can say in all truth that the plenitude of His divinity dwells within us corporeally. Hence it is that the divine Father from on high fixes His loving gaze on us who are the hosts of His only-begotten Son; and invisible legions of angels surround us and accompany us, veiling their faces through reverence, admiring our happiness and the sovereign goodnes of God who has become our Guest and our food. How thoughts such as these should stir us up, impress us, and occupy our minds if we had only one spark of faith!

What, then, does it imply to receive Jesus Christ within us, and at the same time to fail to show Him the requisite respect—remaining cold, indifferent, and distracted in His presence, or forgetting all about Him after a few minutes? This certainly cannot take place without disrespect to Him—indeed to act thus, even to a person of this world who came to pay us a visit, would be a downright insult; nor can it happen without our own loss, since by thus acting, we allow the most precious moments of grace to slip away fruitlessly.

Let us, then, even after the sacramental species have been consumed, remain at least a quarter of an hour devoutly with Jesus Christ; let us ask Him, while He is still really present within us, to impart His graces to us and pour them forth copiously into our souls. On leaving the sacred table, let us retire apart in profound recollection, closing our senses to all exterior things; let us remain kneeling and absorbed in the great thought of the happiness that is ours in possessing Jesus Christ within us; and let us pour out our hearts in holy affections.

The acts to which we should devote ourselves during those moments are principally three—Adoration, Thanksgiving, and Petition.

And first of all let us admire the wonderful abasement of a God who did not disdain to come in person to us and unite Himself to our clay. St. Elizabeth, on being visited by the Blessed Virgin, who then bore the Word of God in her womb, broke forth into those words of astonishment and joy: *And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*[1]—why this great honour that the mother of my Lord comes to visit me? But with how much more reason can we utter the same words in that moment in which, in His infinite, unutterable, wonderful condescension, Jesus Christ has come into our hearts, and, to use the expression of St. John Chrysostom, mixes His divine flesh with ours, His blood with ours, just as two pieces of melted wax become mixed and commingled.—Whence is this to me that my Lord should come to me?

Consequently let us in the second place thank the Lord, with our whole heart; and to correspond to this great blessing, let us make a complete oblation of ourselves to Him, consecrating to Him all that we have and all that we are—our thoughts, our affections, our liberty, our body, our soul, our life—giving ourselves unreservedly to Him, as He has given Himself completely to us.

And that these offerings be not a vain and empty ceremony, we should put them in practice, determine exactly the particular points regarding which we feel that God desires of us a reform and change of life, and make the corresponding resolutions. *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*[2] said St. Paul on the way to Damascus, when he was visibly admonished by the presence and voice of the divine Saviour. He spoke sincerely, without reserve or exception, and his protestation was as efficacious as sincere. It should be the same with us: *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?* Lord, what should I do to please Thee? What sacrifice dost Thou desire of me? What is there in me that displeases Thy all-pure eyes? From my whole heart I submit in all, I offer Thee all, I consecrate myself all to Thee.

Penetrated in fine with the sense of our weakness and misery, let us ask of God, while He is still within us, those graces of which we know we stand in need, compelling Him, so to say, with loving and holy violence, to grant them, and saying to Him as Jacob said to the angel, *I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.*[3] At all times we can profitably demand of God the graces of which we stand in need; but never can we ask them with greater confidence and certainty of obtaining them, than at that moment in which we possess Jesus Christ within us. Can we imagine that He will refuse us anything after having given us Himself? Let us then fervently beseech Him to deliver us from our unregulated passions, and especially from that which predominates and tyrannizes over us; to give us light, contrition, strength against temptation, stability, fervour, and perseverance; to fill us with His divine spirit, with purity, meekness, charity, patience, mortification; and finally to give us His holy love, which embraces all and comprehends all. In the midst of the devout embraces of our soul with Him, He will not fail to hear us. *Delight in the Lord, and He will give thee the requests of thy heart.*[1]

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[1] Luke i. 43. [2] Acts ix. 6. [3] Gen. xxxii. 26.

Finally, on leaving the church after this fervent intercourse with God, how can we lose the feeling and memory thereof so suddenly? How give way immediately to dissipation and disorder, and in a short time lose all the fruit of Communion? Nay, let us rather make a fixed resolution to put in practice all that we have promised God at the moment of Communion, and to remain closely united to Him.

These few reflections selected from the many that could be proposed on this subject, seem sufficient to let you know the proper way to approach Holy Communion worthily and profitably. Would that they were practised faithfully! You would no longer have to sigh over many fruitless Communions. It is a maxim of the Fathers and masters of the spiritual life that a single Communion is sufficient to make us great saints, and yet, O wonder of wonders! in practice a hundred Communions do not suffice to make us even middling Christians! And why? The fault is ours, and it is due to our imperfect dispositions.

Pharao in a dream saw seven very beautiful and very fat kine; then he saw seven others, the leanest and thinnest that could be imagined; yet they had all one and the same pasture—a striking image of the difference that is found to exist even amongst those who frequent Communion with precisely the same regularity. Some steadily grow in virtue, fervour, and piety; while others make no progress, but remain ever the same, with the same miseries and imperfections.

Let us change our lives in this respect, and let us think well on three things:—

1. That the sacraments, efficacious though they are in their nature, operate more or less in proportion to our capacity and dispositions. Hence the greater our purity and fervour, the greater will be the measure of grace we shall receive.

2. That the greatest, the holiest, and the most important action of our lives is Holy Communion, and hence there is no other which it is so dangerous to perform through habit or routine. It is one

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[1] Ps. xxxvi. 4.

thing to be in the habit of doing a thing will; it is another thing to do it merely through habit. The habit of communicating several times a year, monthly, or weekly, or even daily, is highly laudable; but it would cease to be so if Communion were made merely through habit, for in that case all would be reduced to a mere material practice of piety, which, not being animated by a true spirit of devotion, would produce little or no fruit.

3. That a fruitless Communion is always a great evil, because it deprives us of the graces that are attached to this, the most august of all the sacraments; makes us fall into a state of ever-increasing langour and weakness; and hence disposes us insensibly to a sacrilegious Communion.

Keep before your eyes, then, the words of advice given in recent instructions on the preparation for Holy Communion, and never fail to bring with you to the holy table the twofold dispositions of purity and fervour. Fortified with the first disposition, you will avert all danger of profaning the body of the Lord and of committing a sacrilege; adorned with the second you will be worthy to receive the bread of angels holily and profitably

Fourteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

ON FREQUENT COMMUNION

IN recent instructions I have explained the dispositions that are necessary for a worthy Communion, and expedient for a copiously fruitful Communion; I have also enumerated the admirable effects produced in us by Communion; and from all that has been said it will be sufficiently clear that if we desire to experience these effects in all their fullness, we must not allow a long interval to intervene between one Communion and another.

I purpose, however, to conclude the instructions on the sacrament of the Eucharist with an earnest exhortation to communicate frequently. In doing so, I shall first set forth the motives that should induce us to communicate frequently, and then I shall examine the various reasons or pretexts that are usually alleged for not going to Communion frequently.

I know well that the precept of the Church obliges us to no more than one single Communion in the course of the year—at Easter. But this precept has been thus limited and restricted *by reason of the hardness of our hearts*[1] as I have already pointed out several times—I mean that the Church, recognizing the sloth, distaste, and aversion on the part of so many souls, did not, prudent mother as she is, care to demand more nor impose on her children a greater number of Communions, so as not to expose them to the occasion of communicating unworthily on the one hand, or of transgressing her command and thus sinning on the other.

But it is one thing to say that a single Communion suffices to avoid transgressing the Church's precept, and another thing to say that it is sufficient for a good Christian life. Apart altogether from the precept of the Church, are we not bound to comply with the wishes of God, and to make use of the most efficacious means He has prepared to accomplish our eternal salvation?

1. There are two great motives which should induce us to communicate frequently. The first is the intention of Jesus Christ, the Author of this sacrament—an intention sufficiently plain and evident from the manner in which He instituted it, and from the tenor of the expressions used by Him when speaking of it.

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[1] Matt. xix. 8.

(*a*) Regarding the *manner*. He gave us this sacrament as a food, and instituted it under the form of a repast, to signify and let us see that it is a food, a nourishment which we should use, not rarely as one uses medicines, but frequently, like our daily food. And as in the case of the life of the body, all kinds of food are not equally suitable to all men, what has He done? He has selected that food which cannot be done without, which nourishes all without distinction—the rich and the poor, the great and the little—I mean that daily bread which we ask of the Lord, and which is the first and most important support of life—in a word, He instituted it under the appearance of bread, our ordinary and daily food.

(*b*) In the second place, the expressions used by Him could not be stronger or more pressing. He invites us expressly to approach and nourish ourselves with His heavenly bread which is Himself: *I am the living bread, come down from heaven,*[1] a bread of life—not merely of life short and fleeting, but life immortal and eternal. *I am the bread of life: he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.* And should His wishes and His invitations not suffice, He adds the terrible threat, if we do not receive it, to exclude us from life eternal: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you.* We cannot, then, doubt that it is the intention of Jesus Christ to see us often at His holy table.

2. The second reason for communicating frequently is based on the admirable virtue of this sacrament and on our own needs.

As for our needs, they cannot be greater, no matter what the condition in which our soul happens to be. For, we are either penitents recently escaped from the state of sin, and in this state of weakness and convalescence we stand in need of strength to enable us to conquer and destroy our bad habits, and preserve the sancitifying grace we have received; or we are tepid, dispirited, and weak in the service of God, though habitually averse to grave irregularities, and in this very dangerous state of weakness and tepidity, it is highly important for us to take fresh courage, waken up, become reanimated, and fervent; or we are good, earnest, fervent Christians, and we have need to persevere in this state of piety and devotion, and even advance steadily along the path of perfection, since, according to the masters of the spiritual life, there is no standing still in the way of salvation—not to advance is to go back.

Now, where are we to find those graces of support, protection, and defence, if we are sinners only just converted; of courage, renewal, and fervour, if we are tepid; of stability, perseverance, and steady progress, if we are just and faithful to God, unless in the sacrament of the Eucharist? The Eucharist, as I have already said, is the sovereign remedy prepared for us by God to preserve, strengthen, increase, and perfect, spiritual life in us incessantly. And as the infusion of graces must naturally be more or less abundant in proportion to the more or less frequent use we make of the sacrament, it follows as a necessary consequence that our needs, being continual and incessant, the application of the remedy must also be frequent. A food, or a medicine, however good and salutary it may be, cannot produce a good and lasting effect if it is made use of too rarely; and in the same way, if we confine ourselves to communicating only at Easter or a little more frequently, we cannot hope to derive from it a profit proportionate and suitable to our needs.

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[1] John vi. 51.

I now come to answer the objections of timid souls, banish their fears, destroy the fatal prejudices and pretexts that keep away from the holy table so many who might otherwise communicate frequently.

The first excuse alleged for remaining away from Communion for a long time is a falsely-grounded respect for *the excellence and dignity of this great sacrament*, in view of which we consider ourselves unworthy to approach frequently. Assuredly there is to be found in religion nothing so august, divine, and venerable as the sacrament of the Eucharist; but this ought not to be a reason for remaining aloof from it. If a sanctity, a purity, a perfection proportionate to the subject were required, then, indeed, we should always be unworthy to receive it —nay, the very angels in heaven, the most brilliant Seraphim, even the most blessed Virgin Mary, the purest and most perfect of all creatures, would not be worthy, since there is always an infinite distance between us and God, between the creature and the Creator.

It is not, consequently, a disposition fully adequate, and equal to, the object that is required of us, but a disposition corresponding to our state and our strength. God will never regard as a fault that which is impossible to our weakness. If Jesus Christ deigns to dwell within us, if in His infinite condescension He finds His delight to be with the miserable children of men, if He has instituted this sacrament, not for the angels of heaven, but for men of this earth, it will suffice if we bring with us to His holy table a preparation proportionate to the miserable condition of our nature, fortified and purified and elevated by the help of that grace which God denies to none who do the best they can for Him.

"So far so well," you may reply; "but to communicate frequently requires a *great purity of life*, and this I do not consider I possess."

Whatever be the purity of life demanded of you, it is neither impossible nor impracticable, and hence of itself cannot be an obstacle in the way of frequent Communion. It was beyond all doubt the intention of Jesus Christ that Communions should be frequent; and if on the other hand He commands us not to approach His holy table without a pure and innocent conscience, this purity and innocence, indispensable as they undoubtedly are, can and must be reconciled with frequent Communion. Now, though it is quite certain that no purity can be too great, yet why is it that we make so much of it and insist so strongly on it in connexion with frequent Communion? Is it out of a desire to acquire it in order to be able to approach Holy Communion frequently; or is it rather to have a plausible pretext for remaining away? And is it profanation of the Eucharist that we fear; or is it rather the sacrifices which would be imposed on us by preparing for its frequent reception?

"But," you further object, "in spite of all my efforts, I always find that, unlike others, I am full of *imperfections and defects*, and hence I do not think it is right for me to approach so often."

In reply to this we must bear in mind that there are two classes of failings and imperfections. If they are the result of mere human frailty, if they are due to weakness rather than to full and deliberate intention, then, instead of being an obstacle, they are rather a reason for frequenting Holy Communion, which was instituted directly to deliver us from every kind of failing. It is precisely because we are weak, sickly, infirm, that we should have recourse to medicine and to the heavenly Physician who is ready to heal us perfectly. *They*, said our Lord, *that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill*[1]—which amounts to this, that our consciousness of our defects is no reason for remaining away from the sacrament, just as illness is not a reason why one who is ill should resort to no remedy.

With reference to daily failings that are voluntary and deliberate, while it is highly desirable that those who communicate frequently should be free from all deliberate venial sins and from all affection to them, it is, nevertheless, sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the firm intention of sinning no more; and if their resolution is sincere, it is impossible but that they will gradually emancipate themselves even from venial sins and from all affection thereto. This is no mere private opinion, but it is the express teaching of the Catholic Church.*

In any event, since the failings in question are voluntary, they can be removed, and hence cannot even form a plausible pretext for not communicating frequently. Instead, then, of considering that frequent Communion is inexpedient in consequence of daily failings, the proper conclusion would be that the importance of frequent Communion involves the expediency of reforming our life and correcting these failings. Thus, instead of saying, " My daily life is far from being as perfect as it should be, and therefore it is not lawful for me to communicate frequently," we should rather say: " I ought to communicate frequently, so as not to deprive my soul of the inestimable advantages to be derived therefrom; and since frequent Communion calls for a change in my present mode of life, I will strive to improve, correct, and purify it, so as to derive all possible advantage from Holy Communion."

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[1] Matt. ix. 12.

* See Decree of the Congregation of the Council (Dec. 20, 1905), p. 163 supra.

If we have not this disposition it is evident that it is false respect that keeps us from Communion. For true respect is always accompanied by the two conditions of sorrow for not being able to approach frequently, and of the desire to do so. And when these two conditions are present we should spare neither care nor pains to render ourselves as worthy and well prepared as possible. To act otherwise would practically indicate that we do not regret being deprived of Holy Communion; that we prefer rather to live according to our own tastes than to communicate frequently; renounce Holy Communion rather than be obliged to lead a regular life. Surely this is not respect.

The pretexts referred to thus far are the pretexts of the careless and negligent, who would cover their abstention from Holy Communion under the veil of reverence for the sacrament; but there are other timid and pious souls who actually remain away through excessive fear and timidity.

" How can I," they say, " approach the holy table frequently, if I find I derive no fruit from it, and if I am still the same—with the same miseries and imperfections? "

Now, leaving out of account the fruit which may be very real though unseen, is it not a fact that you are averse to the commission of grave sins? And is not the very fact that you are preserved from grave sin, though surrounded by many dangers and temptations, a great and valuable fruit of Holy Communion? As for certain slight defects which spring from your nature and character, and which are hardly ever entirely eradicated, but always more or less cling to you, to serve as a test, and the subject of combat and consequent merit—these should not keep you away from Communion, though it is always expedient when approaching the holy table to have the firm intention to watch over yourself more carefully, and, with the grace derived from the sacrament, to purify your conscience ever more and more. This result is not achieved in a day, but is the work of a life-time. If in communicating you wait until your Communion renders you impeccable and altogether perfect, when do you think will that be ?

"I would willingly approach frequently, but I experience little devotion ; I even find myself in a state of extreme aridity, tastelessness, and want of sensible devotion ; hence I fear I may commit sacrilege through want of actual devotion."

You never commit a sacrilege when you are afraid of committing it, and do all in your power to avoid it. The fear of profaning the sacrament is indeed a good disposition ; but better still is the love which leads you to receive it as fervently as you can.

It is not required that devotion should be sensible. There is a great difference between devotion and sensible devotion, and a person can be very devout without feeling it. Moreover, sensible devotion is not always the surest or truest ; it is subject to many illusions, and in the long run does not depend altogether on our will. We should, then, as Thomas à Kempis observes, humble ourselves when we do not experience it. but its absence should not induce us to remain away from Communion. Make up for the want of a certain fervour of charity by humility, and the sentiment of our own unworthiness along with the lively desire of being united to Jesus Christ, and full and unreserved confidence in Him.

"But would there not be danger of becoming too familiar towards the Blessed Sacrament, and hence of communicating through custom and habit ?"

Custom and habit in good things are good and praiseworthy. Are we to abstain from hearing Mass daily, and saying our prayers daily, for fear of doing so through habit ? The habit of doing these two things is good, but we need not do them through habit ; for what is done merely out of habit is to a great extent done mechanically and without the spirit of true devotion. In this sense it is we say that habit is the greatest enemy of devotion ; for if we do not take care to stand on our guard the holiest and most excellent practices insensibly become purely mechanical actions without heart or soul, and hence with little merit or fruit. Preserve your good habits, then, but let them always be accompanied by a certain interior spirit of religion and piety.

Finally, there is a class of persons who, while perfectly recognizing the advantage, the importance, and the value of frequent Communion, say they have no time to practise it, owing to the many occupations which claim their attention daily.

Now, what reply are we to make to them ? Simply that there could be no more feeble excuse ; as if the affair of eternal salvation, which is the one important affair of our lives, and which is promoted by frequentation of the sacraments, was trivial and less important than our temporal interests. This excuse was reproved by Jesus Christ Himself in the parable of those who were invited to the great supper—a symbol of the Eucharistic supper—and reproved precisely because they had refused the invitation under the pretext of temporal affairs : *I have bought a farm ; I have bought five yoke of oxen ; I pray, thee, hold me excused.*[1] Their excuse was punished by exclusion from the eternal banquet, to which the Eucharistic banquet disposes us in such a way that we cannot remain away from the latter without being cut off from the former : *But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited, shall taste of My supper* [2]

This excuse is not, then, admissible. And in fact can we believe that the time allotted us by the Saviour is given us to be completely devoted to affairs of this world, without even a thought on the world to come ? Is this the judgment we shall pass at the moment of death ?

Let us not, then, be deceived by the demon who tempts us by vain excuses—at one time by a false and hypocritical respect ; at another by an excessive fear and timidity ; at another, by our numerous worldly occupations—to stand aloof from this life-giving sacrament, and thus deprive ourselves of the most efficacious remedy which Jesus Christ has left to heal us from that internal fever which slowly drags us down to death eternal. "Of this bread it is written," says St. Ambrose, "*they that go far from Thee shall perish.*"[3]

And now you will ask, what should be the frequency with which you should approach Holy Communion—whether monthly, fortnightly, weekly, or daily ? I do not undertake to decide—all will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. But this I do know : Our Holy Father Pope Pius X has, in a solemn decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, expressed his earnest desire that all the faithful, without any distinction of rank or condition, should be invited and induced to approach the holy table as often as possible and even daily, the only condition being that each communicant should be in a state of grace and should approach with a right and devout intention. The right and devout intention consists in this, that the person approaching the holy table should do so to please God, be more closely united to Him, and receive thence a divine remedy for his weakness and failings—and not through custom, or habit, or routine, or human respect, or vain glory. Furthermore, while this right and devout intention renders it expedient that those who communicate frequently should, as far as possible, be free from venial sins, or at least from such as are deliberate, and from all affection to venial sin, yet it is *sufficient* that they be free from mortal sin, and have the firm purpose of sinning no more. At the same time it should be remembered that the sacraments produce greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better and more fervent. Hence care should be taken to make a serious preparation before Communion, as well as a suitable thanksgiving after Communion, according to each one's capacity.

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[1] Luke xiv. 19. [2] Luke xiv. 24. [3] Ps. lxxii. 27.

The advisability, then, of frequent Communion, can be no longer called into doubt. It is based on the very nature of the Eucharist, which was instituted as a food, on its intrinsic virtue and efficacy, on the teaching and example of the saints, and on the spirit and mind and express wish of the Church, which desires to see the faithful lead such a life as will enable them to communicate daily.

But, as has been said, the practical application of this doctrine will largely depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The safest course will always be to consult your confessor, and to follow his advice faithfully. The one danger to avoid is that of being influenced by pride, vanity, human respect, or mere custom; the one disposition required, besides the state of grace, is a right and devout intention—the desire to be united to Jesus Christ, and to become more and more devout and holy.

CHAPTER VII

THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST—(*continued*)

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

XV.—THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRIFICE

67.—The Eucharist is the special Sacrifice of the New Law.

IT now remains to explain the Eucharist as a Sacrifice, so that the pastor may know the chief truths which, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Trent, he should expound to his flock on Sundays and Holidays regarding this mystery. The Eucharist is not only a treasure of heavenly riches, by the proper use of which we win the grace and love of God, but it also possesses this special value, that it affords us a means of making some return to God for the immense benefits we have received from Him.

Now, how agreeable and how dear to God is this victim, when rightly and legitimately offered to Him, may be gathered from the following consideration : Of the sacrifice of the Old Law it has been written : *Sacrifice and oblation Thou didst not desire ;*[1] and : *If Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would, indeed, have given it ; with burnt-offering Thou wilt not be delighted.* Yet these sacrifices were so pleasing to the Lord that, as Scripture testifies, He *smelled a sweet savour,*[2] that is, they were agreeable and acceptable to Him. What, then, should we not hope from that Sacrifice in which is immolated and offered that very Person of whom a voice from heaven twice proclaimed : *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased ?*[3] The pastor, then, will carefully explain this mystery to his flock, in order that when assisting at Mass they may be enabled to meditate attentively and devoutly on the sacred function that is taking place in their presence.

68.—Instituted for two great ends.

In the first place, then, let him point out that the Eucharist was instituted by our Lord for two purposes—to be the heavenly food of our souls enabling us to preserve and sustain our spiritual life ;

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[1] Ps. xxxix. 7.
[2] Gen. viii. 21.
[3] Matt. iii. 17.

and secondly, that the Church might have a perpetual Sacrifice by means of which our sins might be expiated and our heavenly Father, too often gravely offended by our sins, be turned from wrath to mercy, from the severity of just punishment to clemency. Of this double purpose we have a figure and an image in the paschal lamb which it was customary for the children of Israel to offer and eat as a sacrifice and sacrament. And assuredly our Saviour, when about to offer Himself to God the Father on the altar of the Cross, could have given us no more striking token of His immense charity than by leaving us a visible Sacrifice, by which the bloody Sacrifice that a little later was to be offered once for all on the Cross should be renewed, and its memory daily and profitably celebrated, down to the end of time, by the Church in every land and clime.

69.—Difference between the sacrament and Sacrifice of the Eucharist.

The difference between the sacrament and Sacrifice of the Eucharist is very great: As a sacrament it is effected by consecration; while every sacrifice consists in oblation. Hence the Blessed Eucharist, while preserved in the tabernacle or when carried to the sick, has the nature of a sacrament, not of a sacrifice. Moreover, as a sacrament, it is a cause of merit to those who worthily receive the sacred Host, and procures them all the advantages which we have already enumerated; while, in its sacrificial aspect, it is not only a source of merit but also of satisfaction. Just as in His passion Christ our Lord merited for us and satisfied for us; so those who offer this Sacrifice, by which they are in communion with us, merit a share in the fruit of Christ's passion, and satisfy for their sins.

70.—Instituted at the Last Supper.

With regard to the institution of this Sacrifice the Council of Trent has left no room for doubt, when it declared that it was instituted by Christ our Lord at the Last Supper, and when it anathematized all those who should dare to assert that a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God therein, or that the offering means nothing more than that Christ is given as our food.

71.—And offered to God alone.

The Council has also taken care to show that this Sacrifice is offered to God alone, and has explained that, although the Church celebrates Masses in memory and honour of the saints, yet the Sacrifice is not offered to the saints but to Him alone who has crowned them with immortal glory. Hence the priest never says: I offer sacrifice to thee, Peter, or to thee, Paul; but in offering sacrifice to God alone, he gives Him thanks for the signal victory achieved by the blessed martyrs, and implores their protection in order "that they whose memory we celebrate on earth may vouchsafe to intercede for us in heaven."

72.—Scripture authority for the Sacrifice of the New Law.

The truths which are taught by the Catholic Church regarding the reality of this Sacrifice, were received by her from the words of the Lord when on that last great night, committing the sacred mysteries to His Apostles, He said to them: *Do this for a commemoration of Me.* He then, as the holy Synod has defined, ordained them priests, and He commanded them and their successors in the priestly office to immolate and offer His body. The words of the Apostle in his letter to the Corinthians point to the same conclusion: *You cannot drink the chalice of the Lord, and the chalice of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord, and of the table of devils.*[1] Now by *the table of devils* we must understand the altar on which sacrifice was offered to them; so, in like manner, for the reasoning of the Apostle to be conclusive *the table of the Lord* can mean nothing else than the altar on which sacrifice was offered to Him.

73.—Figures and prophecies of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Should we seek figures and prophecies of this Sacrifice in the Old Testament, we first of all meet with the words of Malachy, who thus cleary foretold it: *From the rising of the sun even to the going down thereof, My name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation; for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts.*[2] The same Victim was also prefigured by all the various sacrifices which were made both before and after the promulgation of the Law of Moses; for this Victim alone, being as it is the perfection and completion of all the others, comprises all the advantages which were prefigured by the other sacrifices.

But nowhere can we see a more striking figure of the Eucharist than in the sacrifice of Melchisedech, since Jesus Christ our Saviour declaring Himself to be constituted: *A priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech,*[3] at His last supper offered to His eternal Father His precious body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine.

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[1] 1 Cor. x. 21.
[2] Mal. i. 11.
[3] Heb. vii. 17: Ps. cix. 4.

XVI.—THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS IS THE SAME AS THAT OF THE CROSS

74.—**Reasons why: one Victim.** We, therefore, recognize that the Sacrifice which is offered at Mass, is and must be regarded as one and the same with that which was offered on the Cross, in the same way as the Victim is one and the same—Christ, our Lord, who immolated Himself—once only, a bloody Sacrifice on the altar of the Cross; there are not two victims, one bloody and the other unbloody, but one Victim alone, whose sacrifice is daily renewed in the Eucharist ever since our Lord uttered the command: *Do this for a commemoration of Me.*

75.—**One priest.** Furthermore, the priest is one and the same, Christ our Lord—when consecrating His body and blood, the ministers who offer this Sacrifice do not act in their own person but in that of Christ, as is clear from the very words of consecration. The priest does not say: "This is the body of Christ," but: *This is My body*—casting Himself, so to say, into the person of Christ, he changes the substance of bread and wine into the real true substance of His body and blood.

XVII.—OBJECT AND FRUITS

76.—**The Mass a Sacrifice both of praise and propitiation.** This being the case, it must unhesitatingly be taught, as the holy Council of Trent explained, that the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not merely a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving or a bare commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross, but is also truly a propitiatory Sacrifice appeasing God and rendering Him propitious to us. If, therefore, with pure heart, lively faith, and profound sorrow for our sins we immolate and offer this all holy Victim, we shall assuredly obtain mercy from the Lord, and His *grace in seasonable aid.*[1] So pleased is He with the sweet odour of this Victim that He grants us the gifts of grace and repentance, and pardons us our sins. Hence the Church's solemn prayer which is thus expressed: "As often as the commemoration of this Victim is celebrated, so often is the work of our salvation promoted"; for the copious fruits of that bloody Victim are poured in on us through this unbloody Sacrifice.

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[1] Heb. iv. 16.

77.—And its efficacy extends both to the living and the dead.

Finally, the pastor will show that such is the virtue of this Sacrifice that it is profitable not only to the celebrant and communicant, but also to all the faithful, whether they still live with us on earth, or have passed away in the Lord without having fully expiated their faults. For, according to an altogether certain Apostolic tradition, it is not less available when offered for them than when offered for the sins of the living, their punishments, satisfactions, calamities, and trials of every kind.

78.—Is common to all the faithful.

Hence it is easily seen that all Masses, being conducive as they are to the common interest and salvation of all, are to be considered common to all the faithful.

XVIII.—CEREMONIES OF MASS

79.—The ceremonies of Mass.

The celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass is attended by many solemn and imposing rites, not one of which should be deemed superfluous or useless. On the contrary, all tend to display more strikingly the majesty of this august Sacrifice, and, by means salutary and mysterious, to excite the faithful to the contemplation of the divine things that are veiled under the Eucharistic species. We need not, however, dwell on this subject at greater length—it would demand a more lengthened exposition than the scope of this work allows; and besides the pastor has ready to hand a number of books and commentaries composed by pious and learned men.

What has been said thus far will, with the assistance of God, be found sufficient to explain the principal truths regarding the Eucharist both as a Sacrament and a Sacrifice.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

1. THE ESSENCE, INSTITUTION AND ENDS OF THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

Q. Should the Holy Eucharist be considered only as a sacrament?

A. The Holy Eucharist, besides being a sacrament, is also the permanent Sacrifice of the New Law, which Jesus Christ left to His Church to be offered to God by the hands of His priests.

Q. In what in general does a sacrifice consist?

A. In general a sacrifice consists in the offering of some sensible thing to God and in some way destroying it as an acknowledgment of His Supreme Dominion over us and over all things.

Q. What is this Sacrifice of the New Law called?

A. This Sacrifice of the New Law is called the Holy Mass.

Q. What, then, is the Holy Mass?

A. The Holy Mass is the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ offered on our altars under the appearances of bread and wine, in commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Q. Is the Sacrifice of the Mass the same as that of the Cross?

A. The Sacrifice of the Mass is substantially the same as that of the Cross, for the same Jesus Christ, who offered Himself on the Cross, it is who offers Himself by the hands of the priests, His ministers, on our altars; but as regards the way in which He is offered, the Sacrifice of the Mass differs from the Sacrifice of the Cross, though retaining the most intimate and essential relation to it.

Q. What difference and relation then is there between the Sacrifice of the Mass and that of the Cross?

A. Between the Sacrifice of the Mass and that of the Cross there is this difference and relation, that on the Cross Jesus Christ offered Himself by shedding His Blood and meriting for us; whereas on our altars He sacrifices Himself without the shedding of His Blood, and applies to us the fruits of His passion and death.

Q. What other relation has the Sacrifice of the Mass to that of the Cross?

A. Another relation of the Sacrifice of the Mass to that of the Cross is, that the Sacrifice of the Mass represents in a sensible way the shedding of the Blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross, because, in virtue of the words of consecration, only the Body of our Saviour is made present under the species of the bread and only His Blood under the species of the wine; although by natural concomitance and by the hypostatic union, the living and real Jesus Christ is present under each of the species.

Q. Is not the Sacrifice of the Cross the one only Sacrifice of the New Law?

A. The Sacrifice of the Cross is the one only Sacrifice of the New Law, inasmuch as through it our Lord satisfied Divine Justice, acquired all the merits necessary to save us, and thus on His part fully accomplished our redemption. These merits, however, He applies to us through the means instituted by Him in His Church, among which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Q. For what ends then is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered?

A. The Sacrifice of the Mass is offered to God for four ends: (1) To honour Him properly, and hence it is called *Latreutical;* (2) To thank Him for His favours, and hence it is called *Eucharistical;* (3) To appease Him, make Him due satisfaction for our sins, and to help the souls in Purgatory, and hence it is called *Propitiatory;* (4) To obtain all the graces necessary for us, and hence it is called *Impetratory.*

Q. Who is it that offers to God the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass?

A. The *first* and *principal* Offerer of the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass is *Jesus Christ*, while the priest is the minister who in the Name of Jesus Christ offers the same Sacrifice to the Eternal Father.

Q. Who instituted the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass?

A. Jesus Chris Himself instituted the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass when He instituted the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist and said that *this* should be done in memory of His passion.

Q. To whom is the Holy Mass offered?

A. The Holy Mass is offered to God alone.

Q. If the Holy Mass is offered to God alone why are so many Masses celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints?

A. Mass celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints is always a Sacrifice offered to God alone; it is said to be celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints to thank God for the gifts He has given them, and through their intercession to obtain from Him more abundantly the graces of which we have need.

Q. Who shares in the fruits of the Mass?

A. The entire Church shares in the fruits of the Mass, but more particularly: (1) The priest and those who assist at Mass, the latter being united with the priest; (2) Those for whom the Mass is applied, both living and dead.

2. THE WAY TO ASSIST AT HOLY MASS

Q. What is required in order to assist at Holy Mass well and profitably?

A. To assist at Holy Mass well and profitably two things are necessary: (1) Modesty of person; (2) Devotion of heart.

Q. In what does modesty of person consist?

A. Modesty of person consists especially in being modestly dressed, in observing silence and recollection, and as far as possible in remaining kneeling, except during the time of the two Gospels which are heard standing.

Q. In hearing Holy Mass which is the best way to practise true devotion?

A. In hearing Holy Mass the best way to practise true devotion is the following:

1. From the very beginning to unite our intention with that of the priest, offering the Holy Sacrifice to God for the ends for which it was instituted.
2. To accompany the priest in each prayer and action of the Sacrifice.
3. To meditate on the passion and death of Jesus Christ and to heartily detest our sins, which have been the cause of them.
4. To go to Communion, or at least to make a spiritual

Communion while the priest communicates.

Q. What is spiritual Communion?

A. Spiritual Communion is a great desire to be united sacramentally with Jesus Christ, saying, for example: *My Lord Jesus Christ, I desire with my whole heart to be united with Thee now and forever;* and then make the same acts that are to be made before and after sacramental Communion.

Q. Does the recitation of the Rosary or other prayers during Mass prevent us from hearing it with profit?

A. The recitation of the Rosary and other prayers during Mass does not prevent us from hearing it with profit, provided we try as far as possible to follow the parts of the Holy Sacrifice.

Q. Is it advisable to pray for others while assisting at Mass?

A. Yes it is advisable to pray for others while assisting at Mass; nay more, the time of Holy Mass is the most suitable of all times to pray for the living and the dead.

Q. What should we do after Mass?

A. After Mass we should give God thanks for having allowed us to assist at this great Sacrifice, and we should ask pardon for all the faults we may have committed while assisting at it.

Fifteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS—ITS ESSENCE

We now come to explain the Eucharist regarded as a Sacrifice, and in our explanation we shall consider its essence, its principal parts, its purpose, and its fruits. To-day we shall confine our attention to its essence, or in other words, we shall explain how the Mass is a sacrifice.

The Mass is the true and real Sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which is offered each day on our altars under the outward appearances of bread and wine, and which continually represents the Sacrifice of the Cross and applies its saving fruits to our souls. To understand this properly, it will be necessary to enter on certain preliminary explanations regarding the nature of a sacrifice.

There never has been, and there never can be, a religion without some sort of external and visible worship or sacrifice. For, the object of all religion is to honour God by supreme worship, and the most supreme form of worship is precisely sacrifice. Hence it is that to offer sacrifice to the Supreme Being has from the very beginning invariably been regarded as the bounden duty of the human race, and as forming an essential part of the worship due to God. Now, a sacrifice is the visible offering up of some visible thing to God, made by some duly authorized person, to acknowledge, by means of the destruction of, or some similar change in, the thing offered, the supreme dominion of God over all creatures, thereby rendering to Him the supreme homage due to Him alone, and confessing by the action of sacrifice that He is the Lord of life and death, and that we are utterly dependent on Him.

It is easy to call to mind numerous examples. Thus we have the sacrifices offered by Adam, Cain, Abel, Melchisedech, Abraham, Jacob, and of many others who offered up the fruits of the earth to God and consumed them by fire. While under the written Law we find the sacrifices offered by the Jews, who used to slaughter oxen and sheep and other animals in recognition of the honour due to God.

Now, what exactly did they intend to express by this action of burning, killing, destroying, consuming? Simply this: Their action was a public and solemn protestation of their recognition and confession that God is the giver of all good gifts; that He has no need of created things, which are all as nothing in His sight—and hence it is that in His sight they are destroyed and annihilated ; that God is absolute Master of life and death ; that just as they caused the death or destruction of the thing offered, so were they themselves ready to die and be sacrificed in His service ; and finally, that by their sins they had merited the death or destruction inflicted on the victims offered in their place. Such, then, is the meaning, and such the necessity of sacrifice in general, and of the sacrifies of the Old Law in particular.

But the sacrifices of the Old Law, although prescribed by God Himself had of themselves no virtue, and could be pleasing to Him only in so far as they prefigured the great Sacrifice which Jesus Christ was to accomplish in His own person on the Cross—the only sacrifice which could worthily honour God and appease divine justice. For since men had become sinners and abominable in His sight, what had they to offer Him that would in any way be worthy of Him and meritorious in His eyes ? The blood of thousands and thousands of animals could not blot out a single sin or adequately satisfy the justice of God. A sacrifice of infinite value was required—as infinite as is the majesty of that God who had been offended by our sins ; and to provide us with such a sacrifice the Son of God deigned to clothe Himself in our flesh and become our Priest and Victim, expiating our sins on the Cross, and enabling us to satisfy divine justice.

This is the great truth expounded by St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews. It is, he said, impossible for sins to be blotted out by the blood of oxen and goats. Hence it is that Jesus Christ on coming into the world said to His Father : " The sacrifices and holocausts hitherto practised have not been pleasing to Thee ; therefore hast Thou clothed Me with this body ; and now behold I come to offer that body to Thee and to immolate it for sinners " : *Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not ; but a body Thou hast fitted to Me . . . then said I : Behold I come ; to do Thy will, O Lord . . . In the which will we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once . . . By one oblation He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*[1]

The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross was, then, a true Sacrifice ; nay it was the one real Sacrifice—the Sacrifice *par excellence.*

First of all it was a *true* Sacrifice. In every true sacrifice there must be four things : God to whom the sacrifice is offered ; the minister or priest who makes the offering ; the victim, or thing, or creature offered ; and the destruction of that victim in recognition of God's supreme dominion. Now these four conditions are perfectly verified in the Sacrifice of the Cross. It was offered to God on the altar of the Cross; the priest who offered it was Jesus Christ; He, too, was the Victim offered, and offered of His own free will: *He was offered because it was His own will*;[1] while as for the destruction of the victim, it is enough to read the Gospel account of the Crucifixion. Thus did He, at one and the same time Priest and Victim, pay to the majesty of God the homage and glory due to Him; expiated the sins of all the world; and by means of *one single oblation*, according to the words of St. Paul, *hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*[2]

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[1] Heb. x. 5, etc.

It was also the *only* real Sacrifice *par excellence.* The sacrifices that had preceded it were nothing more than shadows and figures of the Sacrifice of the Cross, from which, by anticipation, they derived all their value—they were pleasing to God only in so far as they were offered to Him in union with that of the Cross, and through faith in the Redeemer to come, of whom they were a figure. Hence it is that on the accomplishment of the Sacrifice of the Cross all other sacrifices ceased and were completely abolished, and are no longer lawful.

Is there, then, no sacrifice in the Christian religion? Has the Sacrifice of the Cross rendered all other sacrifices unnecessary or unlawful? Yes and no. No; because, as St. Paul teaches, by that one oblation on the Cross, Christ *perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* But the answer must also be yes.

Sacrifice, as we have seen, is an essential element in every religion. The Christian religion must, then, have its own sacrifice—a sacrifice as perfect as the religion of which it forms a part. Such in fact was foretold in the Old Testament in several prophecies. One such prophecy stands out before all others. It is recorded in the book of the Prophet Malachias and is as follows:—

Almighty God, after having reproached the growing impiety of the Jews, who were His chosen people, and from whom He had been accustomed to receive sacrifice, goes on to say: *I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will not receive a gift from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation.*[3] The clear and obvious meaning of all this is that the Jewish sacrifices were to cease, and be replaced by a pure oblation—a new sacrifice—which was to be offered up to God in every nation and in every place from the rising to the going down of the sun—not merely amongst the Jews, but amongst the Gentiles also; not merely in Palestine, but all over the world. The sacrifice here foretold was, then, to replace the Jewish sacrifices. Was it, then, precisely the Sacrifice of the Cross? No; for the Sacrifice of the Cross was offered only once, and in one place, while the new sacrifice was to be offered everywhere, and every day. Now the Jewish religion and sacrifices have disappeared, and where is this new sacrifice that was to replace them? In the whole Christian religion there is only one sacrifice, only one such solemn act, corresponding to this prophecy, and that sacrifice is, as you know, the holy Sacrifice of the Mass—that pure oblation, offered to God in every nation and in every place from the rising of the sun to its setting, and substituted by Christ our Lord in place of the sacrifices of the Old Law.

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[1] Is. liii. 7.

[2] Heb. x. 14.

[3] Mal. i. 10.

This Sacrifice Christ Himself instituted at the Last Supper on the very eve of His death. As we shall see later on, the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass consists in the separate consecration of the bread and wine. Now at the Last Supper our Saviour truly and really performed this separate consecration of bread and wine into His body and blood; and therefore we say that at the Last Supper Christ offered up the Sacrifice of the Mass. Moreover, in the Gospel account of the Last Supper we read that the words used by Christ were: *This is My blood which is shed for you; this is My body which is given for you—which is broken for you.* But neither at that time, nor indeed until the next day, was there any real effusion or shedding of blood; the effusion, then, of which He spoke could only be mystical, that is to say, He offered Himself up in sacramental forms—His body under the appearance of bread, and His blood under the appearance of wine—both presented in a sacrificial state, that is to say, the blood separate from the body, just as it was to be in all reality next day on the Cross. In His action at the Last Supper, He represented Himself as the mystic Victim offered for all mankind. And offered not once alone, but to be offered to the very end. For He immediately commanded His Apostles and their successors to do precisely what He had done, that is, to consecrate and offer His body and blood mystically under the appearances of bread and wine, in remembrance and commemoration of His passion and death: *Do this for a commemoration of Me;* or as St. Paul explains it, He commanded them by that mystic oblation *to show forth His death till His second coming.* Thus, at the Last Supper, as you will see, He both celebrated the Eucharistic Sacrifice Himself, and commanded the pastors of His Church to do precisely the same until the end of time—until His second coming.

And if we compare the Sacrifice of the Mass with other sacrifices, and especially with that of the Cross, we find it is wanting in nothing that goes to constitute a true and proper sacrifice—neither in victim, nor in priest, nor in altar, nor in oblation to God alone, nor in instrument of immolation, nor in change or destruction of victim.

The *Victim* that is offered up is Jesus Christ—His body and blood under the outward form and mystic appearances of bread and wine: *This is My body which is offered for you; this is My blood which is shed for you.*

The *altar* is present before the eyes.

The *priest* is also at hand—it is Jesus Christ Himself acting through the outward ministry of the lawfully ordained priests of His Church who officiate in His name, He being chief and principal Priest in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. For Jesus Christ is a Priest—He is the Chief Priest of the New Law. True, indeed, no human hand was ever imposed in consecration upon His sacred head, no earthly unction was ever poured over Him. It was God Himself who said to Him: *Thou art a Priest for ever*, thus consecrating Him the priest of the human race, to govern and teach man in all that pertains to God; to offer up to the adorable Trinity, in the name of the human race and for its salvation and happiness, a sacrifice that should not only take away sin, but should also be a truly worthy act of homage, adoration, thanksgiving and prayer.

It was in virtue of this ordination that He instituted the Sacrifice of the Mass—celebrated the first Sacrifice of the New Law, and commanded that it should unceasingly be repeated to the end of time; and by the same virtue He delegated just as much of His priestly office and power as He pleased to those whom He made His visible representatives and substitutes, commanding them to do as He had done, not indeed in their own name or by their own power, but in His name and by His power as His visible ministers, and as the representatives of His Person and priestly office. When, therefore, the priest on the altar comes to the consecration, he speaks and acts, not in his own name nor on his own authority, but in the name and Person of Christ. He does not say: This is the body of Christ: This is the blood of Christ; but he says in the Person of Christ: *This is My body: This is My blood.* In the Sacrifice of the Mass, then, Jesus Christ as well as being Victim is also Priest. "Who is the priest," says St. Augustine, "but that one Priest who entered into the holy of holies? Who is the priest but that one Priest, who is both Priest and Victim, who when He found nothing clean and pure enough in this wide world to offer to the Father in sacrifice, offered Himself?"

Now, what is the *instrument* of the Sacrifice of the Mass? How is the Sacrifice accomplished? A sacrifice, as we have seen, is effected by the destruction or change of some object, and hence demands a suitable instrument of that change or destruction. In the case of living things a knife or sword was used; in other cases fire, and so on; and in one case we know the instrument was the wood of the Cross.

But in the Sacrifice of the Mass, neither knife nor sword, neither fire nor wood is required ; the only instrument used being the words ordained by Jesus Christ—words which do the work of the sword. When a living victim was offered up in sacrifice under the Old Law, the immolation was effected by separating its flesh and blood. So also when Jesus Christ offered himself up in Sacrifice on the altar of the Cross, the immolation was accomplished by the separation of body and blood. But after the resurrection, now that His sacred Humanity has become glorious, immortal, and impassible, the separation of body and blood can only take place in a mystic manner, the words of consecration becoming, so to say, a sword by which a mystic effusion of His blood is effected as a result of the separate consecration of bread and wine. Thus in virtue of the words of consecration of the bread, the body alone is present under the appearances of bread, and in virtue of the words of consecration of the wine, the blood alone is present under the appearances of wine ; in other words, in virtue of the words of consecration, the body and blood of our Lord are mystically and eucharistically separated, and hence represent mystically His real death on the Cross.

From all this it should be clear that the Sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the Sacrifice of the Cross. It is offered to the same God ; the Priest is the same—Jesus Christ ; the Victim is the same—Jesus Christ ; and the immolation is effected in both cases by the separation of body and blood ; the only difference being that in the one case the separation was bloody and real—in the other, it is unbloody and mystic ; that is to say the Sacrifice of the Mass differs from the Sacrifice of the Cross in the manner of offering, which is unbloody.

All this is summed up in the declaration of the Council of Trent which says : " Although in accomplishing our redemption, Jesus Christ offered Himself only once on the altar of the Cross, yet in order to leave to the Church, His spouse, a visible sacrifice representing that offered by Him on the Cross ; in order to perpetuate its memory to the end of time ; and in order to apply its saving virtue for the remission of sins, He at the Last Supper offered to His Father His body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine, and at the same time He conferred the power of offering it under the same symbols on His Apostles whom He constituted priests of the New Testament."

But as well as being a real Sacrifice, the Mass is a Sacrifice of infinite value, by reason of the infinite merit of the Victim who is offered and sacrificed. Ah ! there is an immeasurable difference between this Sacrifice and the sacrifices of the Old Law in which oxen, lambs, doves, or the fruits of the earth were offered up, and in which the priests who offered them were only poor sinners ; while in the

Sacrifice of the Mass that which is offered is Jesus Christ whole and entire, true God and true man—His body and His blood, His soul and His infinitely precious life are sacrificed ; while the priest who offers them is also Jesus Christ Himself, the only-begotten Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, the Saint of saints, the most pleasing object in the eyes of God that ever was or ever can be. Collect together all the merits of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints, the purity of the virgins, the sufferings of the martyrs, the penances of the anchorites, the labours of the Apostles ; and all these added together could not give as much glory to God as He derives from a single Mass.

It is not to be wondered at, then, that this Sacrifice embraces in itself, and in an infinitely admirable manner, the virtue and the value of all the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, the very multiplicity and variety of which demonstrated clearly their intrinsic insufficiency and inefficacy. Yes, the Sacrifice of the Mass alone serves as a holocaust, as a peace-offering, as a eucharistic sacrifice, as a sacrifice of impetration, as we shall see later on when we come to explain the four principal fruits of this divine Sacrifice.

In the meantime, from what has been already explained, recognize the high esteem in which you should hold this divine Sacrifice, which is the most august mystery, the greatest treasure, which our religion possesses ; and remember the profound sentiments of veneration and devotion with which you should assist at it.

If the Sacrifice of the Mass is a representation and a renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, nothing more than this can be said. As often as you assist at it picture to yourselves that you stand on the hill of Calvary, and are spectators and witnesses of the death of Jesus Christ ; and with the eyes of faith contemplate Him agonizing and dying for you. Oh ! if conscious of that great mystery you happened to be present at that bloody tragedy, with what sentiments of faith, respect, thanksgiving, love, and compunction would you not be penetrated ? Such, precisely, are the sentiments which you should bring with you to the foot of the altar, if you desire to show yourselves grateful to God for the gift of so precious a Victim, and to derive thence abundant fruits of sanctification and salvation.

Sixteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE FRUITS OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

In explaining the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass we saw that it is not merely a commemoration—a remembrance—but an express representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross; that it is even the self-same Sacrifice as that of the Cross. For it has the same Victim; and the same Priest who offers Himself by the hands of His ministers—Jesus Christ who offered Himself on the altar of the Cross; the only difference being that the Sacrifice of the Cross was a bloody sacrifice, while the Sacrifice of the Mass is unbloody. In the former the soul was separated from the body by real death; in the latter it is separated by mystic death. In the former, the Saviour purchased the merits of our redemption; in the latter these merits are applied to our souls.

Though this should suffice to show us the infinite value and worth of the Sacrifice of the Mass, yet to make it still more clear, I purpose to explain the four great fruits of this divine Sacrifice, which correspond to the four ends for which it is offered, and which for us are four great duties we owe to God: that is to say (1) To honour Him as much as His infinite greatness deserves; (2) To appease Him, as much as His divine justice, which we have offended, demands; (3) To thank Him as much as His infinite goodness requires; (4) To pray to Him as much as our great need suggests. Of ourselves we cannot pay those obligations, but we can perfectly satisfy for them by the Sacrifice of the Mass.

1. The first duty we owe is to honour the Divine Majesty with the honour it deserves. It is enough to say that we are God's creatures. Compelled as we are to recognize that we do not derive our existence from ourselves, we are bound to acknowledge that it is God who has brought us forth from nothing, who continues to guide and sustain our being. If, then, according to every law, the inferior owes homage and obedience to his superior, the slave to his master, the subject to his sovereign, how much more the creature to his Creator? And this homage should be all the greater in proportion to the greatness and the dignity of the person to whom it is rendered. Now, God being a Lord of infinite greatness and majesty, to honour Him worthily infinite honour and homage would be necessary. But how can honour

such as this be rendered by us who are nothing but lowly, abject slaves? If, according to the expression of Holy Scripture, all creatures are as nothing before Him: *All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing* [1]—our deepest homage does not merit even a glance from a majesty so great. Nay, even were creatures to annihilate and destroy themselves before Him, they could never satisfy the great debt they owe, since there is no proportion between our lowliness and nothingness, and God's infinite majesty and greatness.

But, Jesus Christ be thanked, who has provided us with a means far exceeding and surpassing all the homages of all existing or possible creatures, of honouring the sovereign majesty of God as much as it deserves. That means is the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is called a Sacrifice of *infinite honour*, because in it an infinite Person humiliates Himself to honour infinite greatness. And in truth, what do we believe is done by Jesus Christ when He becomes present on the altar? On the altar Jesus Christ, equal in dignity to His Father, offers Himself to the Father in an act of absolute submission—becomes humiliated, annihilated even so far as to assume the lowly appearances of bread and wine. On the altar, He recognizes and adores the sovereign greatness of God, and as a proof of His ardent desire to honour and glorify Him with the most profound homage He offers His whole Self—His body, His blood, His Humanity and His Divinity; and renewing the Sacrifice of His own life made by Him on the Cross for the glory of God, He shows Himself still ready to suffer a thousand deaths should His divine Father so demand, to honour and glorify Him ever more and more. What object could be more pleasing in the sight of God? Let us, then, unite our humiliations to those of Jesus Christ; let us through Him render infinite homage to God—a homage infinitely greater than if we were in that moment to sacrifice our very life in protestation of His sovereignty and our own nothingness.

2. Another duty we owe to God is *to appease Divine Justice* that has been offended by our sins, and *to give Him adequate satisfaction.*

That God has just reason to be angry with us, exterminate and destroy us, will be clear to each one who merely reflects on the number and gravity of the offences continually committed against Him in every part of the Christian world—evil-speaking, fraud, injustice, betrayal, vengeance, sacrilege, lewdness, and scandals without number or restraint. But how can we be capable of appeasing God, and satisfying His justice thus horribly outraged? Were there even only one sin in question, being as it is an insult, an offence offered to a God of infinite greatness by a poor and lowly creature, it is of its very nature so great an evil that it is impossible to repair it adequately. Not all the sufferings of the martyrs, not all the penances of the anchorites, not all the labours of the Apostles suffice to offer adequate satisfaction for it. Thus then should we be ever exposed to the anger of Divine justice which would ever be ready to take vengeance on our sins.

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[1] Is. xl. 17.

And thus it would truly be, had Jesus Christ not intervened as our Mediator to appease His divine Father, and to preserve us from the thunderbolts launched against us: *He is the propitiation for our sins.*[1] Now, this He accomplishes precisely in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is hence called a Sacrifice of Propitiation; because therein Jesus Christ offers Himself in Person to His Father, and asks pardon and mercy of Him for us, just as on the Cross He asked pardon for His executioners: *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*[2] And very often this suffices to disarm the anger of God and make the avenging sword fall from His hands. Woe to us if we have not this Victim of propitiation ready! How often would the Lord, provoked by our sins, devastate the earth by war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes and floods? If God to-day shows greater clemency to us than He showed in the days of old, notwithstanding the fact that sins increase each day in number and gravity; if He does not renew in our case the terrible examples of rigour and severity which He often gave to the world even for the sins of a single individual, we owe it to His only Son humiliated on our altars. At sight of that Son God forgets His anger and is appeased—Jesus Christ is the rainbow of peace dissipating the clouds and storms gathered over our heads: *He is a propitiation for our sins.*

But this Sacrifice is propitiatory, not only because it appeases Divine justice and suspends the chastisements we deserve; it is also propitiatory in this sense, that it possesses the power of obtaining us pardon of our sins both as to their guilt and as to the punishment due to them. And the reason is, that in the Sacrifice of the Mass is renewed in mystic manner that real effusion and offering of that precious blood concerning which Jesus Christ Himself said: *It shall be shed for the remission of sins.*

It is, then, satisfactory, first of all with regard to the guilt of sin, not indeed in the sense that it remits our sins immediately and directly, for this is the proper effect of the sacrament of Penance, but in the sense indicated by the Council of Trent: "By this oblation God is appeased, and remits even serious sins by conceding the grace and gift of Penance." That is to say, the Sacrifice of the Mass remits our sins in the sense that in itself it possesses the virtue of obtaining for us the grace of conversion and contrition—a virtue not strictly possessed by other good works. To those who assist at Mass, that often happens which happened to the executioners, of whom it is related that after their horrible crime they went down from Calvary penetrated with sorrow and striking their breasts. Thus also will the blindest and most obstinate sinners, if they assist at Mass with the proper dispositions, be interiorly touched by divine grace, and strongly stimulated to cleanse themselves from their faults and return once more to God.

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[1] 1 John ii. 2.

[2] Luke xxiii. 34.

But as well as being an efficacious remedy for delivering us from the guilt of our sins, the Mass is also a rich treasure enabling us to pay the debts of punishment we may have contracted by sin. You will remember that even though sin is pardoned, all the punishment due on account of it is not always remitted, but that there still remains a temporal punishment to be undergone either in this life or in the life to come. You will also remember that our good works, our alms, our prayers, our penances do not as a rule suffice to acquit us of our debt, because though they have a certain value, they nevertheless are not equal to the debt we have contracted with God. What, then, are we to do if we desire to avoid remaining His debtors eternally? Here also Jesus Christ has furnished us with a ready and safe means, handing over to us for our use the infinite treasure of the merits which He offered to His divine Father, and which we can offer in payment of all our debts through means of the Sacrifice of the Mass in which He has collocated that treasure of His infinite merits.

Nay, the treasure of these merits is so abundant that you can use them not only for yourselves, but also for the souls departed, and hence it is that the Sacrifice of the Mass is said to be *propitiatory for the living and the dead.* True, indeed, the souls in Purgatory are no longer in a position to acquire any merit of themselves, and hence cannot of themselves have recourse to the merits of Jesus Christ; yet by God's merciful dispensation they can benefit by the application of these merits effected by means of us, if we offer the holy Sacrifice with the intention of obtaining them either some relief or full and complete liberation from their sufferings. This is the surest means of affording them succour—nay, it is often the only means. For if you are in mortal sin, and do or try to do any other good work for the relief of the souls in Purgatory, you have no certainty that you really succeed in your purpose; while it is certain that the Sacrifice of the Mass will help them, no matter what your state—even were you in the state of actual enmity with God. The reason of this difference is that in your other good works which you offer, God takes account of your merits and dispositions; and if you are in enmity with Him, He cannot accept as good for others the works which are of no avail even for yourselves. While, on the other hand, in the Sacrifice of the Mass He neither considers your unworthiness, nor that of the celebrant, but only the merits of the Victim which is offered to Him, that is, Jesus Christ ; hence by this offering you can always afford useful help to the souls in Purgatory. Let us now briefly consider the other two duties we owe.

3. The third duty we owe to God is to *thank Him as much as He deserves for the benefits* He has bestowed on us. Infinite, indeed, are the obligations we are under towards Him for the ceaseless and inestimable benefits which He has given us—benefits general and particular, both natural and supernatural, both of nature and of grace. Turn where we will we are surrounded by His benefits—all that we have and all that we are comes from Him. *What hast thou that thou hast not received?*[1] We are, therefore, strictly bound to show Him our gratitude. But what suitable recompense or equivalent can we offer Him for all His benefits? *What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He hath rendered to me?*[2] The unreserved offering of ourselves, our heart, our liberty, our goods, our very life itself, would be always infinitely less than the least of the benefits He has conferred on us in His infinite love. Thus we should be always compelled to live ungrateful to Him, were we abandoned and left to ourselves.

But here, also, God has provided for our poverty and misery by the Sacrifice of the Mass which is hence called *Eucharistic*, that is, a Sacrifice of supreme thanksgiving. By means of this Sacrifice we are enabled to make an offering to God equal to all the benefits and graces we have received from His divine liberality. For in offering the true body and blood of Jesus Christ we offer Him a gift of infinite value—a gift which of itself is worth more than all the other gifts we have received, since it is God Himself that we offer.

4. Finally, our fourth and last duty is to *pray to God for all the graces and blessings we stand in need of* owing to our extreme poverty and indigence. We stand in continual need of divine graces for the soul as well as for the body, for time as well as for eternity ; and although God sometimes grants them to us without our asking them, nevertheless He grants them, as a rule, only in response to our prayers : *Ask and it shall be given to you*[3]—thus willing us to recognize His supreme dominion over us and our total dependence on Him. But how could we dare to present ourselves before God, and how could we hope He would hear our prayers, if of ourselves we deserved only to be rejected and punished by Him ? Yet such is really the case ;

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[1] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [2] Ps. cxv. 12. [3] Matt. vii. 7.

but fear not, for if our prayers have of themselves no value, we still possess an all-powerful means of rendering them most precious and so efficacious that the divine Majesty not only cannot reject them, but cannot even refuse to hear them. And what is that means? It is the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is on that account called a Sacrifice of *Impetration*, that is to say, capable of obtaining for us all the graces we stand in need of. And how can it be otherwise? Has not Jesus Christ told us that if we ask the Father anything in His name He will infallibly grant it to us: *If you ask the Father anything in My name He will give it to you.*[1] But in the Sacrifice of the Mass we ask in His name in such a way that to move God to hear us we present to Him the merits and the very Person of His only Son—a gift incomparably greater than any request we can ask. Nay, in the holy Mass it is precisely Jesus Christ Himself who intercedes for us; He it is who undertakes our cause, becomes our advocate, presents our supplications to His Father, enforcing them with all the weight of His infinite merits and intercession: *Jesus Christ who died . . . who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*[2] Now what motive can be more powerful and more efficacious to move God, and induce Him to hear us? If we of ourselves merit nothing, He merits all from His Father. Hence it is that at Mass the Church prays for all our needs, both of body and soul, both public and private.

Such, then, is the worth and excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass—such the inestimable blessings it contains; while through its means we are enabled abundantly to discharge all the debts we have contracted towards God.

Summing up in a few words all I have already said, this is what we shall find: We are God's creatures—creatures loaded with His blessings, creatures often ungrateful to Him and rebellious against Him, creatures who always stand in need of Him. Hence arises the necessity, the duty, of honouring Him, thanking Him, approaching Him, beseeching Him. But the infinite distance between us and Him renders us vile and contemptible in His sight, and it would be impossible for us to discharge these duties if He had not furnished us with the assistance of this divine Host which is offered and sacrificed each day for us on the altar. It alone can and does render us truly capable of all. How many, then, and how great are the obligations we owe Him for having given us so precious a Victim, with the help of which we are enabled to discharge worthily all the duties we owe to God?

Now, are all the precious fruits I have explained up to this really partaken of by all those who assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass?

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[1] John xvi. 23.

[2] Rom. viii. 34.

Would to God it were so! For some, the Sacrifice is useless and fruitless, not indeed through the Victim's fault, but through their own neglect and malice. Thus the sacraments are, as we know, most efficacious in themselves; yet are they not often not only useless, but harmful? We must say the same of the most august Sacrifice of the altar. In the eyes of God, Jesus Christ is always a pure, holy, acceptable, and infinitely precious Victim; but He cannot operate in us without our help and co-operation. The outward offering of Jesus Christ on our altars, all precious as it is in itself, produces no fruit in us if we do not add thereto the interior sacrifice of our hearts, if we do not on our part enter into the dispositions with which He offered Himself to His Father.

Hence it will be highly useful to point out the best method of hearing Mass, and of deriving therefrom all the fruits it can confer. Accordingly this will be the subject of our next instruction.

Seventeenth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE MANNER OF HEARING MASS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARING IT FREQUENTLY

From what has been already said on the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and on the fruits to be derived from it, I draw two conclusions which will form the subject of to-day's instruction :—

1. The best and most practical manner of hearing it ; and

2. The importance of hearing it as frequently as we can, even on those days on which there is no obligation of hearing it.

1. Regarding the first point, although the Sacrifice of the Mass is of infinite value, it nevertheless can through our own fault be made, to a certain extent, almost useless to us, as happens only too often in the case of the sacraments. It is, therefore, highly important to ensure its effects, by hearing it in the best possible manner. And what is that manner ? You can easily divine it from the doctrine already laid down. If the Sacrifice of our altars is a commemoration and a renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, even though a mystic and unbloody one, and if Jesus Christ has instituted it to perpetuate in our midst the memory of His holy passion and death, it is clear that the best manner of hearing it is to occupy ourselves holily with thoughts of the sufferings endured for us by Jesus Christ.

And from the very outset as a first preparation, be well persuaded that a lively faith should accompany you on your way to holy Mass, which you should regard as the greatest and most sublime act of our religion, calling to mind that in a certain way you are ascending the Hill of Calvary, and are spectators at the crucifixion and death of Christ. Faith such as this is highly necessary to assist thereat without distraction of soul, coldness of heart, levity and want of recollection—all of which not only deprive us of the fruits of the Sacrifice, but often render us guilty of transgressing the precept of hearing Mass, if not even of sometimes profaning this great mystery.

In the next place, it is highly desirable to accompany the priest throughout the whole celebration of the Sacrifice, and offer it to God with him. For it is not the priest alone whom you see on the altar who offers the Sacrifice of the Mass, but along with him are associated all those present, each one according to his degree. Hence it is that the priest calls the Sacrifice, which he offers, not only his own Sacrifice, but also the Sacrifice of all those who assist thereat, and this is why he invites the people to unite themselves with him and accompany him through the holy oblation, and also why he uses terms and language common both to himself and the people.

These preliminary observations being borne in mind, it will now be necessary to observe that to occupy yourselves during the time of holy Mass with the passion and death of Christ is by no means a practice beyond your capacity. For who is there who does not know the history of the sufferings of our Lord ? Now we should call these sufferings to mind, not only on Good Friday, but each and every day, and especially when assisting at the divine Sacrifice. This is why the Church has aimed at facilitating meditation thereon, by the care she has had to represent, by means of the various ceremonies of Mass, the principal circumstances of the passion and death of our Saviour. All is mystical and significant in the ceremonies of this divine Sacrifice. A few words will suffice to show this.

When you see the priest bowed down at the foot of the altar and making confession of his sins, picture to yourself Jesus Christ praying in the garden of Olives, loaded with the sins of all the world ; and then ask pardon of your sins in a humble confession, which you should also make in His presence. It would indeed be desirable that all those who assist at the divine Sacrifice should be in a state of grace ; but those who are in a state of sin should not on that account imagine they are forbidden to be present, and much less should they imagine that by being present they commit a new sin. For such a doctrine is heretical, contrary to the precept of the Church, and deprives the sinner of a powerful motive for his conversion. Still although the state of sin does not exclude your participation in the divine Sacrifice, you are bound by every reason to recognize, in unison with the priest, at the Confiteor, the deplorable state of your soul before God, and to show that you at least conceive a sincere desire of amending your life ; and this with the object of removing the greatest obstacle to the fruit of the Sacrifice of the Mass —which obstacle is hardness of heart, indolence, and insensibility to the state of sin.

Then, when the priest goes to the different sides of the altar for the Epistle and Gospel, picture Jesus Christ led before the different tribunals of Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and Herod ; and during the prayers said in silence by the priest, call to mind the snares and plots of the Scribes and Pharisees against the life of our Lord.

Leaving aside, for the sake of brevity, a number of reflections that could be made, and confining my attention to that which is more important and more necessary, the principal part of the Mass is that which extends from the Consecration to the Communion of the priest. When the priest, bowing down over the Host and chalice, pronounces the divine and all-powerful words, then heaven is opened, Jesus Christ in person becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine, and, surrounded by thousands of angels invisibly present to adore Him, offers once more to His eternal Father the great offering He made on Calvary. The elevation of the Host is a figure of Jesus Christ raised up on the Cross, and that of the chalice represents to us His precious blood which He poured forth for our redemption. Moments such as these should be the most precious of our lives.

And then we should offer that adorable Victim, there present, for the four ends of which I have already spoken, and for which the divine Sacrifice was instituted—to glorify God, appease His anger, bless His goodness, and obtain His mercy, and beseech the graces of which we stand in need or which we desire for ourselves or for others. During Mass you can, indeed, offer other prayers, but you should never forget to make this offering; and were you to do nothing else during the whole course of Mass but to repeat this offering, it is an excellent manner of hearing Mass, and a practice which is not above the capacity of even the most ignorant.

But in order that this offering may be pleasing to God and profitable to ourselves, it is necessary that it should not be a mere material offering, or an offering only of the lips; but it should be made in union with Jesus Christ and with the dispositions with which He offered Himself to His Father. Let our hearts, then, be penetrated and filled with a keen desire of glorifying God, humble compunction at the sight of our sins, sincere feelings of gratitude for the mercies and blessings which God has shown us, and finally with an ardent desire of obtaining His graces, united with a feeling of our own unworthiness.

Animated by these dispositions, let us offer to God this pleasing and holy Victim which will supply for our own insufficiency and powerlessness to honour and thank Him worthily, to appease Him and merit His graces. And let us say: *Look, O Lord, on the face of Thy Christ*[1]—do not, O Lord, consider my demerits and my unworthiness, but consider only the Person of Thy only Son here present, and in consideration of Him be merciful and favourable to us. If we regard ourselves alone, we are miserable, we are sinners, and unworthy to raise our eyes towards heaven to implore Thy mercy; but in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass we become, so to say, depositories and owners of this divine Victim which is placed at our disposal to be offered by us to God, and hence full of holy courage and boldness we can turn to Him and say to Him: "*Look, O Lord, on the face of Thy Christ*—that which I offer Thee is the body and blood of Thy only Son. But this body and blood are now mine—all mine; and in offering them to Thee I am confident of being able to give Thee greater glory than I have taken from Thee by my numberless sins; of being able to thank Thee properly for all the countless blessings I have received and still receive from Thy hands; of being able to obtain not only from Thy mercy, but also from Thy justice, all the graces I stand in need of—graces Thou wilt grant me in consideration of the price I offer Thee, which is nothing less than the immaculate body and precious blood of Thy divine Son. Of myself I merit nothing; but this Victim of redemption who gives Himself wholly to me in this Sacrifice merits all from Thee—*Look, O Lord, on the face of Thy Christ.*

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[1] Ps. lxxxiii. 10.

"Accept, then, O eternal Father, this holy oblation in recognition of Thy sovereign greatness and my nothingness: *My substance is as nothing before Thee*;[1] *O God, Thou knowest my foolishness*;[2] *Thou knowest that we are dust.*[3] Ah, how have dust and ashes such as this dared to rebel against Thee? Pardon me my sins and my blindness. Accept this Sacrifice in satisfaction for the countless sins of my life—how numerous they are, and how far have I strayed from Thee, my last end? *If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?*[4] I have no other refuge than the infinite merits of this Victim who sacrifices Himself on the altar for me; through these merits give me a full knowledge of my sins, a sincere detestation of them, the grace to shun them and to avoid all occasions and dangers of committing them. Accept it in thanksgiving for all the blessings Thou hast granted me, and especially for the infinite patience and goodness with which Thou hast borne with me, and bearest with me still. Oh! let not Thy patience be turned into an increase of my sins, but let me use it to repair all the mistakes of my past life."

Finally, let us glance at the various needs by which we are surrounded, and let us ask of God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, the graces that are necessary for ourselves and for others. Let us ask them in the first place for ourselves, and let us ask not only for temporal blessings of health, prosperity, and success in our undertakings, but also for spiritual blessings, such, for instance, as the sacrifice of a favourite passion which is leading to our ruin; resistance, against temptations; flight from sin and from dangerous occasions; the grace of God and holy perseverance. Then let us ask also for our relatives, our friends, our benefactors; and let us especially recommend to God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, the poor, sick, and dying; those who are in sorrow and tribulation; those to whom we may have been the occasion of sin and ruin by our scandal; as also those who have injured us or wish us harm; and in general, for all the needs of our Church, and our country; for the unjust, the impenitent; for heretics, infidels, and all Christians living and dead.

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[1] Ps. xxxviii. 6. [2] Ps. lxviii. 6. [3] Ps. cii. 14. [4] Ps. cxxix. 3.

Such, then, should be your principal occupation up to the Communion of the priest, which represents the burial of our Lord. If you do not communicate sacramentally, do so at least spiritually, desiring to receive Jesus Christ within you, and beseeching Him to make you a sharer in His divine Spirit. And, finally, when the priest gives the last blessing to the people, beseech the Father Eternal, through love of His divine Son, to bless you and protect you from every evil during the day.

This seems to be the most suitable and the most salutary way to hear Mass. It does not hinder you from saying other prayers, but you can always say them while attending in some way to the points I have referred to. Those who know how to read will easily be able to find books which contain excellent methods and which may profitably be followed; while as for those who cannot read, it suffices for them to assist at Mass with lively faith in Jesus Christ crucified and with the desire of participating in the four fruits of the divine Sacrifice.

2. It now remains for me to recommend you to assist frequently at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass—it will, of course, be at once understood that I speak only of those days on which you are not bound by the laws of the Church to assist at Mass. Even though you cling tenaciously to other devotions and pious practices which are all equally a matter of choice, I should be sorry to see you omit that which is first, greatest, the most important, and which justly merits preference before all others. After all I have said on the infinite, inestimable value of the Sacrifice of the Mass, can it be that a law of the Church is required to compel you to assist at it? Will it not rather suffice for you to be assured by faith that this act of our religion is the most acceptable to God, and the most advantageous to ourselves?

And yet, how many there are who restrict themselves to hearing Mass barely on days of obligation, and who regard it as a tiresome burthen even then, and who would never dream of hearing Mass on a week-day! Enter the church on a week-day, and you find it almost empty during Mass. You see the streets, the squares, the places of amusement and business crowded with the idle and unoccupied, while the church is almost deserted. What a bad return is not this for the love of Jesus Christ towards us, and for the ineffable gift He presents for us on the altar? He sacrifices Himself for us to His divine Father, He offers to Him the honours due to Him by us, the payment of our debts, and His prayers for help in our miseries ; while we are insensible to all these tender proofs of His love, and make no more account of them than if we knew nothing at all about them. Now is not this in all truth a disregard of the greatest of all God's blessings ?

If God had ordained that the divine Sacrifice could be celebrated only in one place, or very rarely, such, for instance, as once a year, what desire should we not have, what trouble should we not take, to be present at it, remembering the infinite value faith tells us it possesses ?

And what are the excuses we make to ourselves for not assisting frequently at Mass ? For the most part there is no other reason than that of indolence, laziness or inactivity. An excessive love of our own ease, a certain dislike to being disturbed or inconvenienced, either by the state of the weather, or by the distance to be traversed, suffices to detain us. But one would like to ask whether these motives would be strong enough to keep us away from amusements, or pleasure parties. Rather would we not hasten to be present, even at the cost of some inconvenience, not only in person, but in purse ? Is there not in this contrast something to make us blush if we possess but a spark of faith ?

But, someone may say, there is no obligation. I grant it ; but let us understand one another. It is true there is no particular obligation to hear Mass on week-days ; but there is always the general obligation binding on everyone, to employ time well, do good works, use, as far as possible, the means of salvation mercifully afforded us by God—all of which amounts to this, that when able you should not neglect assisting at Mass, which is the best of all possible ways of using time, the holiest work, and the most efficacious means of salvation.

I will furthermore add—and bear this well in mind—that he is not a good Christian who discusses and examines everything with God, disputes with Him, and refuses to do anything for Him to which he is not strictly bound. In conduct such as this we cannot recognize the true character of piety, fervour, and devotion.

But someone else may say : I really should not fail to assist regularly at Mass if I had only time ; but my occupations are so many and so pressing that I have not a single free moment of my own. I answer that time can always be found if you really want to find it. How many others there are who are much more occupied than you and yet can find time ? How many poor artisans and labourers go to daily Mass at a very early hour, though pressed by the claims and calls of their daily labour ? It is not, then, the time that is oftenest wanting, but the will.

Judge yourselves impartially and you will see whether you cannot defer some of your business to another time, whether you cannot rise a little earlier and take a little less sleep, which is perhaps too long already, and finally whether you cannot manage to regulate the duties of the day in such a way as to leave time for this great act of our religion.

Let it not enter your mind that in devoting a little time to hearing Mass you are injuring your temporal interests or at least are subtracting a certain amount of time from those interests. You would grossly deceive yourself were you to think thus, for so far from being a loss it is rather a gain for you. I have already shown—and the point is of faith—that the Sacrifice of the Mass is a supreme Sacrifice of impetration for every blessing both spiritual and temporal. Far, then, from being opposed to your interests, assistance at Mass will be a source of blessing and prosperity for you.

And so it is. Nay, the maxim laid down by our Lord applies here: *Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all things else shall be added unto you.* Let your first and principal business be the spiritual interests of your soul—cultivate the practice of true devotion, amongst which must be numbered the hearing of daily Mass; and God, in whose hands are all things here below, and from whom all prosperity depends, will take care of all your interests, and will even find a way to reward you temporally.

But leaving aside temporal concerns, which should neither be the only nor the principal object of our desires, might we not rather look higher and strive to obtain those blessings which can render us eternally happy? Sincere sorrow for our sins, which is as necessary as it is rare, pardon of our faults, the grace of God, aversion to sin, victory over the evil habits we may have contracted, the acquisition of Christian virtues, perseverance in good works, a death holy and precious in the sight of the Lord—this is what we ought principally to desire, and this is precisely why I exhort you to hear Mass frequently, because it is the most efficacious means of obtaining these blessings.

As often, then, as this devotion is at all compatible with the circumstances in which you find yourselves, do not omit to practise it. Doing this, you will render the greatest possible glory to God, and provide for all your own needs. It will be helpful to you during life, but especially helpful in the hour of death—because in that supreme moment God visibly protects and assists, by a special assistance, all those who during life were devout to the divine Sacrifice. More than this I could not say; it is for you to profit by it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—Frequent and accurate explanation of the sacrament of Penance urgently demanded.

As the frailty and weakness of human nature are well known, and as each one easily experiences their effects in himself, so no one can fail to see the necessity of the sacrament of Penance. If, then, the diligence which the pastor should manifest in all his instructions is to be measured by the weight and importance of the subject-matter, we must unreservedly confess that in the explanation of this sacrament he can never be too zealous. Nay, the explanation of the sacrament of Penance demands much greater care than even that of Baptism, because Baptism is administered only once and can never be repeated, while the sacrament of Penance may be administered, and in fact its repetition become necessary, as often as one falls into sin after Baptism.

Hence it is that Penance is stated by the Council of Trent to be no less necessary for the salvation of those who have fallen into sin after Baptism, than is Baptism for those who have never been regenerated; while the well-known words of St. Jerome, that Penance is " the second plank after shipwreck," have been highly approved by all who have written on sacred subjects since his day. For when a ship has been wrecked, the only hope of life is to seize, if possible, on some plank cast up from the wreck; so when once baptismal innocence is lost, there is no hope of salvation unless we have recourse to the plank of Penance.

All this is intended to animate not only the pastor but also the faithful at large to guard against being found wanting in zeal for that which is of such far-reaching necessity. Impressed with a just sense of human frailty their most ardent desire should be, with divine assistance, to walk in the ways of God without any sin or failing; but should they sometimes fall, let them first of all turn their eyes towards the infinite goodness of God who, like a good shepherd, binds up and heals the wounds of His sheep, and in the next place let them then bear in mind that this most saving remedy of Penance should not be postponed from day to day.

2.—The several meanings of the word penance.

Entering into the subject without further preamble, it will first of all be useful to explain the various significations of the word penance, so as to guard against error arising out of the ambiguity of the word. Some, for instance, by penance mean satisfaction; while others, who are far removed from the teaching of Catholic faith, pretend that penance has nothing whatever to do with the past, and define it simply as "new life." It must, therefore, be shown that the meanings of penance are many:—

(*a*) First of all, the word is applied to those who are displeased with something which was previously pleasing to them, without, however, taking into consideration whether that thing is good or bad. Such is the repentance of those whose *sorrow is according to the world, not according to God* [1]—a penance which *worketh not salvation but death.*

(*b*) Another sort of penance is that which arises when, not for sake of God but for one's own sake, one conceives sorrow for having committed some bad action in which he previously took pleasure.

(*c*) A third kind of penance is that in which we not only experience interior sorrow of soul, or give outward expression to that sorrow, but are imbued with that sorrow for the sake of God alone.

To each of these classes of sorrow the word repentance properly applies.

But when we read in Holy Writ that *God repented,*[2] it is evident that the statement is figurative. This manner of expression is accommodated to the mode of human speech, and Holy Scripture uses it as such to denote that God has resolved to effect some change, just as happens in the case of men who when sorry for something do all they can to change it. It is in this sense it is written that *it repented Him that he had made man;*[3] and in another passage, *that He had made Saul king.*[4]

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[1] 2 Cor. vii. 10.
[2] Gen. vi. 6.
[3] Gen. vi. 6.
[4] 1 Kings xv. 11.

I.—PENANCE CONSIDERED AS A VIRTUE

3.—The difference between the various meanings of the word.

There is a wide difference between these various meanings of the word penance. The first sort of penance must be considered faulty; the second is merely an affliction and affection of a troubled soul; while we call the third both a virtue and a sacrament. In this last sense the word is here used.

First of all we shall treat of penance as a virtue, not only because it is the pastor's duty to form the faithful to every kind of virtue, but also because the acts of this virtue supply the matter as it were on which penance as a sacrament hinges; and if from the beginning we do not rightly understand what the virtue of penance really is, it will be impossible ever thoroughly to comprehend the efficacy of the sacrament.

4.—Penance is sorrow and detestation of sin with a firm resolution of sinning no more.

In the first place, then, the faithful should be admonished and exhorted to take every care and make every effort to obtain this interior sorrow of soul which we call a virtue, and without which exterior penance is of little avail. Now this interior penance consists in turning to God with all our heart, detesting and hating the sins we have committed, and firmly and deliberately resolving to amend our past lives and corrupt practices, in the hope of obtaining pardon through the mercy of God.

Accompanying this penance, like an inseparable companion to detestation of sin, comes a sorrow—a sadness—which is an agitation or disturbance of the soul, and which many call a passion. Hence, in the mind of several of the Fathers, the definition of penance is based on anguish of soul such as that described.

5.—Pre-supposes faith.

Faith, however, must precede penance in the penitent man—without faith no man can turn to God; and hence faith can in no way be rightly called a part of penance.

6.—Interior penance is really a virtue.

That this interior penance is, as we have said, a virtue, is clearly proved by the numerous precepts which God has given regarding it—a law (or precept) regulates those actions only which are undertaken meritoriously.

Besides this it cannot be denied that to be sorry at the time, in the manner and to the extent which are required, is a virtue. Now the proper regulation of this sorrow is the function of the virtue of penance. For it sometimes happens that men conceive a kind of sorrow for their sins that is not equal to what is requisite. Nay, there are some, as Solomon writes, *who are glad when they have done evil*;[1] while on the other hand there are others who so far abandon themselves to sorrow and uneasiness of mind as utterly to despair of salvation. Such seems to have been the case with Cain when he said: *My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon*;[2] and such certainly was the case of Judas, who, urged on by remorse, hanged himself and lost both life and soul. By the virtue of penance, then, we are enabled to regulate our sorrow within due limits.

7.—Proved also from the object the penitent has in view.

The same conclusion may be drawn from the ends which the truly penitent man proposes to himself. The first aim is to destroy sin and wipe away from his soul every spot and stain. The second is to satisfy God for his sins, which is clearly an act of justice. True, indeed, between God and man there can be no strict justice, since they are both separated by an infinite interval; yet it is certain that between them there does exist a sort of justice which may be compared to that which exists between a father and his children, between a master and his slaves. The third is to return to the grace of God, whose enmity and hatred he has incurred by the filthiness of his sin. Now all these ends sufficiently show that penance is a virtue.

8.—The steps towards this virtue.

The steps leading up to this divine virtue should also be pointed out:—

(*a*) The mercy of God first goes before us and turns our hearts to Him. Hence the Prophet's prayer: *Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted.*[3]

(*b*) Illumined by this light we next tend in spirit to God by faith: *He*, says the Apostle, *that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a Rewarder to them that seek Him.*[4]

(*c*) Then follows a sense of fear, and the soul, contemplating the severity of the punishments meted out to sin, is recalled therefrom. The words of Isaias seem to refer to this state of soul: *As a woman with child, when she draweth near the time*

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[1] Prov. ii. 14. [2] Gen. iv. 13. [3] Lam. v. 21. [4] Heb. xi. 6.

of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs ; so are we become.[1]

(*d*) Then comes the hope of obtaining pardon from God, and encouraged by this hope we resolve to change our lives and amend our ways.

(*e*) Lastly, our hearts are inflamed by charity, whence springs that filial fear characteristic of good and well-disposed children ; and thus dreading one thing only—the fear of offending God's majesty—we thoroughly abandon the ways of sin.

9.—The principal fruit of penance is life eternal.

Such, then, are the steps by which to attain the exalted virtue of penance—a virtue which must be regarded as altogether divine and heavenly, and to the possession of which Holy Writ promises the kingdom of heaven. Thus in St. Matthew it is written : *Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ;[2] and in Ezechiel : *If the wicked do penance for all the sins he hath committed, and keep all My commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live* ;[3] and in another place : *I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*[4]—words which clearly must be taken to mean eternal life.

II.—PENANCE AS A SACRAMENT

10.—Reason for its institution.

Regarding external penance it will be necessary to show that it is in it the sacrament properly consists, and that it possesses certain outward and sensible signs which denote the effect that takes place interiorly in the soul.

(*a*) In the first place, however, it will be well to explain why it is that Christ our Lord was pleased to number Penance among the sacraments. One of His reasons certainly was to leave us no room for doubt regarding the remission of sin which was promised us by God when He said : *If the wicked do penance,* etc. For each one has good reason to distrust the accuracy of his own judgment on his own actions, and hence we could not but be very much in doubt regarding the truth of our internal penance. It was to destroy this, our uneasiness, that our Lord instituted the sacrament of Penance, by means of which we are assured that our sins are pardoned by the absolution of the priest; as also to tranquillize our conscience by means of the trust we rightly repose in the virtue of the sacraments. The words of the priest sacramentally absolving us from our sins are to be accepted in the same sense as the words of Christ Himself when He said to the paralytic: *Son, be of good heart—thy sins are forgiven thee.*[1]

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[1] Is. xxvi. 17. [2] Matt. iv. 17. [3] Ez. xviii. 21. [4] Ez. xxxiii. 11.

(*b*) In the second place, no one can obtain salvation unless through Christ and the merits of His passion; and hence it was becoming in itself, and highly advantageous to us, that a sacrament should be instituted through the force and efficacy of which the blood of Christ flows into our souls, washes away all the sins committed after Baptism, and thus leads us to recognize that it is to our Saviour alone we owe the blessing of reconciliation.

11.—Penance truly a sacrament.

That Penance is a sacrament the pastor will have little difficulty in showing. As Baptism is a sacrament because it blots out all sins, and especially original sin, so for the same reason Penance, which takes away all the sins of thought and deed committed after Baptism, must be regarded as a true sacrament in the proper sense of the word.

Moreover—and this is the principal reason—since what is exteriorly done, both by priest and penitent, denotes the effect that takes place in the soul, who will venture to deny that Penance is invested with all the properties of a true sacrament? For a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing. Now the sinner who repents plainly expresses by his words and actions that he has turned his heart from sin; while from the words and actions of the priest we easily recognize the mercy of God exercised in the remission of sins.

In any event, the words of our Saviour furnish a clear proof: *I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.*[2] The absolution announced in the words of the priest expresses the remission of sins which it accomplishes in the soul.

12.—This sacrament may be received more than once.

Not only should the faithful be instructed that Penance is to be numbered amongst the sacraments, but that it is one of the sacraments which may be repeated. To Peter who had asked whether pardon could be given to sin seven times our

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[1] Matt. ix. 2.

[2] Matt. xvi. 19.

Lord replied: *I say not to thee, till seven times; but till seventy times seven.*[1] If, then, the pastor happens to encounter those who seem to distrust the infinite goodness and clemency of God, let him endeavour to inspire their minds with confidence, and raise them up to the hope of obtaining the grace of God. He will easily accomplish this object by explaining this and other passages which are frequently met with in Holy Writ; as well as by using the arguments and reasons which may be found in St. Chrysostom's book on *The Lapsed,* and St. Ambrose's books *On Penance.*

III.—MATTER AND FORM OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

13.—The matter of Penance.

Now there is nothing that should be better known to the faithful than the matter of this sacrament; they should be taught that Penance differs from the other sacraments in this, that while the matter of the other sacraments is some thing whether natural or artificial, the matter *as it were* of the sacrament of Penance is the acts of the penitent—Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction—as has been declared by the Council of Trent. Now inasmuch as these acts are by divine institution required on the part of the penitent for the integrity of the sacrament and for the full and perfect remission of sin, they are called *parts* of Penance. It is not because they are not the real matter that they are called by the Council *the matter as it were,* but because they are not of that sort of matter which is applied externally, such, for instance, as water in Baptism and chrism in Confirmation.

As regards the opinion of some, who hold that sins are the matter of this sacrament, it will be found, when carefully examined, that it does not really differ from the explanation already given. Thus we say that wood which is consumed by fire is the matter of fire; in the same way, sins which are destroyed by Penance may be properly called the matter of Penance.

14.—The form of Penance.

The pastor will not neglect to explain the form of the sacrament of Penance—a knowledge of it will excite the faithful to receive the grace of this sacrament with the greatest possible fervour and devotion. Now the form is: *I absolve thee*, as may be inferred not only from the words, *whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven*,[1] but also from the teaching of Christ our Lord handed down to us by the Apostles.

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[1] Matt. xviii. 22.

Moreover, since the sacraments signify what they effect, the words *I absolve thee* signify that remission of sin is effected by the administration of this sacrament, and hence it is plain that such is the perfect form of the sacrament. For sins are, so to say, the chains by which the soul is bound, and from which it is freed by the sacrament of Penance. And none the less truly does the priest pronounce the form over the penitent who through perfect contrition, accompanied by the desire of confession, has already obtained remission of his sins from God.

15.—The form is accompanied by prayers.

Several prayers are added, not that they are necessary to the form, but in order to remove every obstacle that can impede the force and efficacy of the sacrament owing to the fault of him to whom it is administered.

16.—The power of absolution.

How thankful, then, should not sinners be to God for having bestowed such ample power on the priests of His Church! Unlike the priests of the Old Law who merely declared the leper cleansed from his leprosy, the power now given to the priests of the New Law is not limited to declaring the sinner absolved from his sins, but as a minister of God he truly absolves from sin—an effect which God Himself, the author and source of grace and justice, accomplishes (by the ministry of his priests).

17.—Rites used in the administration of this sacrament.

The faithful should take great care to observe the rites which accompany the administration of this sacrament. In this way they will have a higher idea of the effects accomplished in this sacrament—that is, that they have been reconciled as slaves to their kind master, or rather as children to their best of fathers; and at the same time they will also better understand what is the duty of those who desire (as everyone should) to show their gratitude and thanks for so great a benefit.

The sinner, then, who repents, casts himself humbly and sorrowfully at the feet of the priest, in order that by there humbling himself he may the more easily be led to see that he must tear up out of his heart the roots of pride whence spring and flourish all the sins he now deplores; in the priest who is his legitimate judge he venerates the person and the power of Christ our Lord—in the administration of the sacrament of Penance as in that of the other sacraments the priest holds the place of Christ; then he enumerates his sins—acknowledging, at the same time, that he deserves the greatest and severest chastisements; and finally, suppliantly asks pardon of his faults.

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[1] Matt. xviii. 18.

All these rites have a sure guarantee for their antiquity in the words of St. Denis.

IV.—THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

18.—The principal effects of the sacrament of Penance.

Nothing will prove of greater advantage to the faithful, nothing will be found to conduce more to a willing reception of the sacrament of Penance, than for the pastor to explain frequently the great advantage to be derived therefrom. They will then see that of Penance it is truly said that its roots are bitter, but its fruit sweet indeed.

First of all, then, the great efficacy of Penance consists in this that it restores us to the grace of God, and unites us to Him in the closest friendship.

In pious souls who approach this sacrament with piety and faith, profound peace and tranquillity of conscience, together with ineffable joy of soul, sometimes accompany this reconciliation.

There is, moreover, no sin, no matter however great or horrible, which cannot be effaced by the sacrament of Penance, and that not merely once, but over and over again. On this point God Himself thus speaks through the Prophet: *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live and shall not die, and I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done;*[1] and St. John: *if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;*[2] and a little later he adds: *If any man sin* (he excepts no sin whatever), *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the just; for He is the propitiation for our sins—and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.*[3]

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[1] Ez. xviii. 21, 22. [2] 1 John i. 9. [3] 1 John ii. 1, 2.

19.—How it is that some sins are said to be irremissible?

When we read in Scripture that certain persons did not obtain pardon from God, even though they earnestly implored it, we know that this was due to the fact that they had not a true and heartfelt sorrow for their sins. Thus when we find in Sacred Scripture and in the writings of the Fathers, passages which seem to assert that certain sins are irremissible, we must understand the meaning to be that it is very difficult to obtain pardon of them. A disease is sometimes called incurable because the patient is so disposed as to loath the medicines that could afford him relief. In the same way certain sins are not remitted or pardoned because the sinner rejects the grace of God, the only medicine of salvation. It is in this sense that St. Augustine wrote: "When a man who, through the grace of Jesus Christ, has once arrived at a knowledge of God, wounds paternal charity, and driven by the fury of envy lifts up his head against grace, the enormity of his sin is so great that though compelled by a guilty conscience to acknowledge and confess his fault, he finds himself unable to submit to the humiliation of imploring pardon."

20.—Without Penance there is no remission of sins.

Returning now to the effects of the sacrament, it is so much the special province of Penance to remit sins that it is impossible to obtain or even hope for remission of sin by any other means: *Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish* [1]—words which were said by our Lord in reference to grievous and mortal sins; although at the same time lighter sins, which are called venial sins, also require some sort of penance, St. Augustine observes that, "The class of penance which is daily performed in the Church for venial sins, would be absolutely useless, if venial sin could be remitted without penance."

V.—THE INTEGRAL PARTS OF PENANCE

21.—There are three integral parts of Penance.

But as it is not enough to speak in general terms when treating of practical matters, the pastor will take care to explain, one by one, all the faithful need to know in reference to the qualities of true and salutary Penance.

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[1] Luke xiii. 3.

Now it is peculiar to this sacrament that besides matter and form, which it has in common with all the other sacraments, it has also, as we have said, those parts which constitute Penance, so to say, whole and entire—namely, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. On these St. John Chrysostom thus speaks: "Penance enables the sinner to bear all willingly—in his heart is contrition; on his lips confession; in his actions humility or salutary satisfaction."

These three parts belong to that class of parts necessary to constitute a whole. The human body is composed of many members—hands, feet, eyes, and the various other parts, the want of any one of which makes the body be justly deemed imperfect; while if none of them is missing the body is regarded as perfect. In the same way, Penance is composed of these three parts in such a way that though Contrition and Confession, which justify man, are alone required to constitute its essence, yet unless accompanied by its third part—Satisfaction—it necessarily remains short of its absolute perfection. These three parts are, then, so intimately connected with one another, that Contrition includes the intention and resolution of confessing and making satisfaction; Contrition and the resolution of making satisfaction imply Confession; while the other two precede Satisfaction.

22.—The mutual selection of these parts.

The reason why these are the integral parts may be thus explained. Sins are committed by thought, by word, and by deed. It is, then, but reasonable that in recurring to the power of the keys we should endeavour to appease God's wrath, and obtain pardon of our sins by means of the very same things which we employed to offend His Holy Name.

A further reason can also be assigned. Penance is a sort of compensation for sin, springs from the free will of the delinquent, and is appointed by God against whom the offence has been committed. Hence, on the one hand, there is required the willingness to make compensation—in which willingness contrition chiefly consists; while on the other hand the penitent must submit himself to the judgment of the priest (who holds God's place), in order to enable him to award a punishment proportioned to the gravity of the sin committed; and hence the reason for and necessity of Confession are easily inferred.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1. PENANCE IN GENERAL

Q. What is the sacrament of Penance?

A. The sacrament of Penance, also called Confession, is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to remit the sins committed after Baptism.

Q. Why is the name of Penance given to this sacrament?

A. The name of Penance is given to this sacrament, because to obtain pardon for sins it is necessary to detest them penitently; and because he who has committed a fault must submit to the penance which the priest imposes.

Q. Why is this sacrament also called Confession?

A. This sacrament is also called Confession, because to obtain pardon for sins it is not enough to detest them, but it is necessary also to accuse oneself of them to the priest, that is, to make a confession of them.

Q. When did Jesus Christ institute the sacrament of Penance?

A. Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance on the day of His resurrection when, entering the Supper Room, He solemnly gave His Apostles the power of remitting sin.

Q. How did Jesus Christ give His Apostles the power of remitting sin?

A. Jesus Christ gave His Apostles the power of remitting sin thus: Breathing upon them He said: *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained.*

Q. What is the matter of the sacrament of Penance?

A. The matter of the sacrament of Penance is divided into *remote* and *proximate.* The remote matter consists of the sins committed by the penitent after Baptism; and the proximate matter are the acts of the penitent himself, that is, contrition, confession and satisfaction.

Q. What is the form of the sacrament of Penance?

A. The form of the sacrament of Penance is this: *I absolve thee from thy sins.*

Q. Who is the minister of the sacrament of Penance?

A. The minister of the sacrament of Penance is a priest authorized by the Bishop to hear confessions.

Q. Why do you say that a priest must be authorized by the Bishop?

A. A priest must be authorized by the Bishop to hear confessions, because to administer this sacrament validly the power of Orders is not enough, but there is also necessary the power of jurisdiction, that is, the power to judge, which must be given by the Bishop.

Q. Which are the parts of the sacrament of penance?

A. The parts of the sacrament of Penance are contrition, confession, and satisfaction on the part of the penitent, and absolution on the part of the priest.

Q. What is contrition or sorrow for sin?

A. Contrition or sorrow for sin is a grief of the soul leading us to detest sins committed and to resolve not to commit them any more.

Q. What does the word contrition mean?

A. Contrition means a crushing or breaking up into pieces as when a stone is hammered and reduced to dust.

Q. Why is the name of contrition given to sorrow for sin ?

A. The name of contrition is given to sorrow for sin to signify that the hard heart of the sinner is in certain way crushed by sorrow for having offended God.

Q. In what does confession of sins consist ?

A. Confession of sins consists in a distinct accusation of our sins made to the confessor in order to obtain absolution and receive penance for them.

Q. Why is confession called an accusation ?

A. Confession is called an accusation, because it must not be a careless recital, but a true and sorrowful manifestation of our sins.

Q. What is satisfaction or penance ?

A. Satisfaction or penance is that prayer or other good work which the confessor enjoins on the penitent in expiation of his sins.

Q. What is absolution ?

A. Absolution is the sentence which the priest pronounces in the name of Jesus Christ when remitting the penitent's sins.

Q. Of all the parts of the sacrament of Penance which is the most necessary ?

A. Of all the parts of the sacrament of Penance the most necessary is contrition, because without it no pardon for sins is obtainable ; while with it alone, perfect pardon can be obtained provided that along with it there is the desire, at least implicit, of going to confession.

2. The Effects and the Necessity of the Sacrament of Penance, and the Dispositions to Receive it Properly.

Q. Which are the effects of the sacrament of Penance ?

A. The sacrament of Penance confers sanctifying grace by which are remitted the mortal sins and also the venial sins which we confess and for which we are sorry ; it changes eternal punishment into temporal punishment, of which it even remits more or less according to our dispositions ; it revives the merits of the good works done before committing mortal sin ; it gives the soul seasonable aid against falling into sin again ; and it restores peace of conscience.

Q. Is the sacrament of Penance necessary to all for salvation ?

A. The sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation to all who have committed a mortal sin after Baptism.

Q. Is it a good thing to go to confession often ?

A. Yes, it is an excellent thing to go to confession often, because the sacrament of Penance, besides taking away sin, gives the graces necessary to avoid sin in the future.

Q. Has the sacrament of Penance the power of remitting all sins, no matter how numerous or how great they are ?

A. The sacrament of Penance has the power of remitting all sins, no matter how numerous and great they are, provided it is received with the requisite dispositions.

Q. How many conditions are necessary to make a good confession ?

A. To make a good confession five things are necessary : (1) Examination of conscience ; (2) Sorrow for having offended God ; (3) A resolution of sinning no more ; (4) Confession of our sins ; (5) Satisfaction or penance.

Q. What should we do first of all to make a good confession ?

A. To make a good confession we should first of all earnestly beseech God to give us light to know all our sins and strength to detest them.

Eighteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

ON PENANCE IN GENERAL

EVEN after having been made Christians and children of God by Baptism ; even after having been confirmed in grace by Confirmation, we can nevertheless fall away from that state—we can sin, and by our sin return to the slavery of the devil and consequently merit eternal damnation. Now, if that misfortune were to happen to us as it has happened to so many others, what remedy is open to us, seeing that these two sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation cannot be received a second time, in consequence of the character impressed by them ? A remedy there is, a remedy always ready and open to us—the sacrament of Penance, which has been instituted precisely to wipe away the sins committed after Baptism. Here is what the Council of Trent declares in reference to Penance : " If Christians were grateful enough to God to remain strong and firm in the grace of holy Baptism, there would have been no need of the sacrament of Penance. But God, who is rich in mercy, knowing our frailty and foreseeing our fall, has established another remedy to restore life to those who after Baptism may have abandoned themselves to the slavery of sin and the power of the devil ; and this remedy is the sacrament of Penance, which is therefore called by the Fathers *the second plank after shipwreck*, that is to say, the only resource remaining to the Christian to save himself once he has had the misfortune to lose his baptismal innocence.''

It is on this sacrament that I now propose to dwell, and at considerable length in view of the fact that it is a sacrament which should be very extensively availed of by us ; a sacrament which is indispensable to the salvation of those who may have fallen into mortal sin ; a sacrament, in fine, which requires several dispositions on our part to enable us to share in its salutary effects. It is, then, of the very utmost importance to be thoroughly instructed on the subject. In the present instruction, I shall confine myself to a few preliminary considerations regarding the nature of this sacrament with a view to dispelling certain injurious and far from uncommon prejudices in reference to the sacrament of Penance.

In order to form a correct notion of this sacrament, we must consider penance both as a virtue and as a sacrament—for these are two very different things. When moved at the sight of our faults we conceive remorse and sorrow for them, and form the resolution to avoid them and make due satisfaction to God for them, we have at once the virtue or the spirit of penance ; but when penetrated with this sentiment we cast ourselves at the feet of the priest and receive absolution at his hands—then we have the sacrament of Penance.

As a sacrament, Penance was not always a matter of necessity, but the virtue of penance has been necessary always and at all times. To become reconciled to God, it has been always necessary for the sinner to detest his sins, and make a firm resolution of sinning no more and of expiating them thoroughly. Sins there have been always in the world ; but how did sinners obtain pardon of them before the coming of Jesus Christ who instituted the sacrament ? They obtained it by penance, and they could obtain it in no other way than by the virtue of penance. In all Sacred Scripture we do not find a single example of pardon granted by God to an unrepentant sinner.

Not only was this virtue necessary in every time, but also for every kind of sin. Be the sin grave or light, be it mortal or venial, God does not remit it without a true spirit of compunction, not even in the case of the Baptism of adults : *Do penance and be baptized every one of you.*[1]

Finally, this virtue is necessary not only to those who are actually in a state of sin, but also to those who have been sinners though they are so no longer ; for those also ought always to bear impressed on their hearts the sorrowing remembrance of the sins they once committed, even though these sins have been confessed and pardoned, and they ought always to preserve the desire and intention of making due satisfaction to God. Nay, this precisely is the certain sign that distinguishes the true penitent from the false.

But since Jesus Christ in the New Law established a sacrament for the remission of sins, the virtue of penance is no longer sufficient to obtain pardon, but it is necessary also to have recourse to the means ordained by Him. Listen to the solemn words He addressed to His Apostles when instituting the sacrament of Penance after His resurrection : *As My Father hath sent Me, so also I send you.* And then He breathed on them to communicate His divine Spirit to them, and added : Remember this, that sins shall be remitted to whomsoever you remit them, and they shall be retained to whomsoever you retain them. *He breathed on them and He said to them : Receive*

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[1] Acts ii. 38.

ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained.[1]

Now, what do these words signify? They signify that in His Church Jesus Christ has established a permanent and perpetual tribunal before which every sinner must appear in order to obtain pardon for his sin; that over this tribunal the Apostles and their successors preside as judges, and that they pronounce sentence in the name of Jesus Christ; that their sentence looses us from our sins, or leaves us still bound by them—in a word, they signify that this sacrament has been established under the form of a real judgment; and consequently that from this judgment and this tribunal we cannot escape if we desire to obtain pardon of our sins. Without this every other means would be insufficient.

Are we, then, to belive that in consequence of the institution of this sacrament and of the divine power conferred by Jesus Christ on the priests of His Church, the virtue of penance has been rendered less necessary for us than it was before? Oh! that indeed is a great illusion into which people sometimes fall by attaching undue power to the absolution of the priest, and neglecting what is more important, the interior spirit of penance which alone can render absolution efficacious. The necessity of penance, then, is as great as it was before—it is even a part of the sacrament, which is hence called the *sacrament of Penance.*

Two things conjointly go to compose the sacrament of Penance—the acts of the penitent and the action of the priest. On the part of the priest, there is required absolution. Now, if this absolution sufficed of itself, it would be necessary to admit that as many as receive it at the hands of the priest are truly reconciled to God. But we are certain beyond all shadow of doubt that the sentence pronounced by the priest here below is not always ratified in heaven, and that many are condemned in heaven while being absolved by the priest on earth. Now this cannot arise from any want of power in the priest, because that power is altogether real, being founded on the infallible word of God; it consequently arises from some defect in the dispositions that are demanded of the penitent by God as necessary towards the constitution of the sacrament.

And thus it really is—a truth clearly taught us by the words of Jesus Christ already given. It was not simply the power of absolving that He gave to the priests of His Church, but the power of absolving and of not absolving—*whose sins you shall retain they are retained*—a commission which implies that they do not grant the benefit of absolution to all without distinction, but that they are to discriminate, observe a distinction between penitent and penitent—a distinction that must not be arbitrary or capricious, but founded on the pentient's interior dispositions, according to which he is judged worthy or unworthy of the grace of the sacrament.

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[1] John xx. 22, 23.

This, then, is the other part of the sacrament—a part that depends on the penitent. It does not consist merely in the accusation of one's sins, though such accusation is necessary, since the confessor in his judicial capacity cannot decide on the state of the sinner's conscience without a knowledge of the case; but it does consist principally in contrition of heart which in its widest sense embraces both detestation of the sins committed and firm resolution to avoid them for the future and to make due reparation for the injury done by them to God—which contrition is substantially nothing else than the virtue of penance which as we have seen is absolutely indispensable for returning to the grace of God. So far was Jesus Christ from wishing to dispense us from the virtue of penance when instituting this sacrament, that He even constituted penance exteriorly manifested in a sorrowful declaration of our sins as an essential part of the sacrament, which is on that account, as already said, called the sacrament of Penance. Jesus Christ, in instituting it, has done no more than superadd the action of the priest who receives the confession of the various sins, absolves them in our Saviour's name, and imposes a suitable penance. Consequently the virtue remains in all its force, and it is of it precisely that Jesus Christ said to all without distinction: *Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish.*[1]

To sum up all this in a few words: To obtain pardon of our sins Penance is necessary in both its acceptations—as a virtue and as a sacrament. Penance as a virtue alone is not enough now, as it once was, without the sacrament, simply because the means now assigned by Jesus Christ for the remission of sin is precisely the sacrament. Hence no matter how contrite and sorrowful we may seem to ourselves to be, we must actually have recourse to the sacrament of Penance, or, in case of necessity, must at least have the desire to receive it. But, on the other hand, the sacrament is not enough without the virtue of penance, because notwithstanding the fact that Jesus Christ has attached to the absolution given by the priest the real and intrinsic power of blotting out sin, this power remains impeded and inefficacious if we are not animated by the true spirit of penance. Both one and the other, then, are conjointly necessary—

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[1] Luke xiii. 5.

the sacrament as a means, the virtue as a disposition. Hence we say that the sacrament of Penance is a sacrament by which the Christian who is contrite and who confesses his sins obtains pardon of them by means of the absolution given by the priest.

Let no one, then, approach the sacred tribunal without being animated by the spirit of penance. Nay, I should go further, and say that the spirit of penance is of such necessity that it is more necessary than the sacrament itself, and for this reason: That the sinner must accuse himself of his sins at the feet of the priest and receive absolution from him in order to obtain pardon is a necessity only in so far as God in the present condition of things will not grant that pardon without this condition; but this condition depended absolutely on His will, and He could have dispensed us from it, just as He actually does sometimes dispense us from it, resting satisfied with our desire of confession when we are unable to receive the sacrament provided we are otherwise well-disposed. But true conversion of the heart to God, detestation of sin, the sincere spirit of penance—all that is so necessary that God Himself could not exempt us from it without ceasing to be God. Being, as He is, infinite holiness, He cannot but hate sin with an implacable, necessary, infinite hatred, and hence He cannot be reconciled to the sinner as long as the sinner does not retract his sin and conform himself to the divine will by hatred and detestation of that sin. In one word, the absence of the sacrament can in certain conditions be supplied by the virtue of penance; but nothing can supply for the absence of the virtue without which a thousand absolutions would be of no avail.

From what has been said thus far, you will easily see that the nature of this sacrament is but little understood by very many Christians.

First of all, it is little understood by those who imagine that the priest is the arbiter and master of absolution so far as to be able to grant it according to his own sweet will. It is in consequence of some such false notion as this that penitents plead and argue in order to obtain it on those occasions in which the priest, who for his part would ask nothing better than to absolve the whole world, sees there are not sufficient proofs that they are converted and properly disposed —nay, has strong proofs to the contrary, and consequently is thoroughly persuaded that he cannot grant it without profaning the sacrament, wounding his own conscience, and even seriously injuring the penitents themselves. *Profaning the sacrament*, for he who receives it without being properly disposed profanes it; *wounding his own conscience*, for he would only bind his own conscience without loosing theirs; *seriously injuring themselves*, for besides the fact that he would expose them to the risk of committing a sacrilege, he would set up within them a false and injurious confidence that they have been pardoned before God, whereas they are in reality still unforgiven.

Furthermore, this sacrament is generally little understood by all those (and they are far from few) who imagine it consists in a simple narration of their sins and in the absolution of the priest, without any sincere intention to change their heart and life. I believe that what contributes much to this notion is the name *Confession* usually given to this sacrament, as if all were reduced to the mere confession of one's sins; but it should be borne in mind that while the sacrament is called Confession on account of the necessity of self-accusation which is, however, its least essential part, it is also and with much greater reason called, in the language of the Fathers and of Holy Scripture, the *sacrament of Penance*, by reason of the still greater necessity of a change of heart and soul.

Some, however, do not reflect on this point; and hence it is that outside the accusation of their sins all the rest is for them nothing more than a mere formality. Contrition, for instance, is only a form consisting in the mere recital of an act of attrition or contrition, such as may have been committed to memory or is read in a prayer-book; or, at the most, it is accompanied by a second or two of emotion, a dash of sentiment or of tears which leave the heart unchanged and are very soon dried. Their resolution of amendment is nothing more than a lip-promise made to God never to offend Him again—a promise that means nothing and leads to no practical result. If the intention was really serious and resolute, it would assuredly cause much more concern since its subject-matter is nothing less than very real renunciations, sacrifices, and detachments which are adopted in order not to offend God any more; but when all is reduced to mere words, all is easily promised. The satisfaction due to God for the grave injury done Him is limited to a few easily recited prayers imposed by the priest, which being as they are altogether out of proportion to the number and gravity of the sins committed, should simply serve to warn us of the penance we ought to impose voluntarily on ourselves. Yet how many are the penitents who make it their business to supply in this way for the insufficiency of their satisfaction.

Now, examine the matter sincerely: In all this line of conduct where is that penitent heart which alone merits the attention and the mercy of God, and to which alone pardon of our sins has been promised? And this being so, is it a matter for astonishment that little or no fruit is derived from so many confessions which leave us always in the same condition and which never produce a sincere change of life and conduct in us? It should cause no surprise at all; for what good effect can be produced by a penance which is not a penance, but a mere varnish, a sham penance?

Thus far I have given you a simple outline of the subject which I intend to explain step by step on future occasions.

Meanwhile I shall conclude for the present by observing that it is not precisely the absolution given by the priest that secures your conscience, but it is your own good interior disposition which will ensure the effect of sacramental absolution. Aim, then, principally at this in your heart if you wish to know with a fair amount of probability whether you have obtained pardon. Otherwise you will run the serious and only too common risk of believing yourself healed and perfectly sound, whereas in reality you are in the sight of God weaker and more covered with wounds than ever.

CHAPTER IX

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—(*continued*)

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

VI.—CONTRITION

23.—Definition of contrition.

Now as it is necessary to instruct the faithful on the nature and efficacy of each of the parts of Penance, it will be well to begin with Contrition, which should be carefully explained. At all times, without exception, as often as our past transgressions recur to our minds, or whenever we offend anew, so often should the heart be pierced by contrition.

The Fathers of the Council of Trent thus defined contrition: "Contrition is a sorrow and detestation of past sin, with a firm resolution of sinning no more." And a little later on, speaking of the evolutions of contrition, the Council adds: "Thus does it prepare for the remission of sin, provided it is accompanied by confidence in the mercy of God, and an earnest resolution to do all that is necessary for the proper reception of this sacrament."

From this definition the faithful will readily understand that the essence of contrition does not merely consist in ceasing to sin, in resolving to enter on a new life, or even in actually entering on this new life; but that before all else it consists in detesting one's ill-spent life and desiring to atone for it.

The cries of the Fathers, which we often find poured forth in Holy Writ, strongly confirm this: *I have laboured in my groanings*, says the Psalmist, *every night I will wash my bed;* and *the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping*;[1] while Isaias cries out: *I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul*[2]—which words, and others of a similar character, are the evident expression of profound hatred of their past life and a lively detestation of their sins.

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[1] Ps. vi. 7, 9.

[2] Is. xxxviii, 15.

24.—Why contrition is called sorrow. In defining contrition as sorrow, it will be necessary, however, to warn the faithful that they are not to imagine that the sorrow here meant consists in sensible feeling; for contrition is an act of the will, while, as St. Augustine observes, sorrow is not penance, but the companion of penance. By the word sorrow the Fathers signified detestation and hatred of sin, both because Sacred Scripture thus uses the word; as for instance, when David says: *How long shall I take counsels in my soul, sorrow in my heart all the day?*[1] and also because from contrition arises sorrow in the inferior part of the soul, which is the seat of concupiscence. It is not without reason, then, that contrition has been defined a "sorrow" because it produces sorrow, and because, of old, penitents, to denote its presence, were even accustomed to change their garments—a practice alluded to by our Lord in St. Matthew: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sack-cloth and ashes.*[2]

25.—Why called contrition. To denote the intensity of this sorrow, rightly has the name *contrition* been given to the detestation of sin of which we speak, and it has been given precisely because analogous to those objects which are broken into small pieces by a stone or some harder material. The word is here used to signify that our hearts, hardened by pride, are broken and subdued by penance. Hence no other sorrow—not even the sorrow caused by the death of parents or children or any other calamity—is called by this name, which is absolutely reserved to denote that sorrow with which we are afflicted by the loss of God's grace and of our own innocence.

26.—Other designations. It is also designated by other names. Thus it is sometimes called "contrition of heart," owing to the fact that Holy Writ frequently uses the word heart to denote the will—just as the heart is the principle of the body's movements, so the will directs and governs the other powers of the soul. The Fathers also call it "compunction of heart," and thus, by preference, entitle their books on contrition. Just as ulcers are cut with the knife in order to allow the matter gathered within to escape, so the heart is pierced as it were by the lance of contrition to enable it to emit the deadly virus of sin. Hence the Prophet Joel calls contrition "a rending of the heart." *Be converted to Me with all your hearts*, he says, *in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning; and rend your hearts.*[1]

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[1] Ps. xii. 2.

[2] Matt. xi. 21.

VII.—THE QUALITIES OF CONTRITION

27.—Sorrow for sin should be supreme.

That sorrow for the sins committed should be supreme and deep to such an extent that nothing greater can be imagined, is easily demonstrated by the following considerations:—

(*a*) Perfect contrition being an act of charity proceeding from filial fear, it is evident that charity and contrition should be measured according to the same standard; now as that charity by which we love God is the most perfect form of love, it follows that the interior sorrow which accompanies contrition must be the keenest and most perfect; for as God is to be loved above all things, so whatever separates us from God must be detested above all things. In this respect it should be observed that the extent of charity and of contrition is marked in identical terms by Holy Writ. Thus of charity it is said: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart*;[2] while in reference to contrition the Lord cries out by the Prophet: *Be converted with all your heart.*[3]

(*b*) In the second place, if it is true that of all good things that deserve our love, God is the first and greatest, it is also true that sin is the first and greatest of all the evils that deserve our hatred; and hence it follows that the same reason that obliges us to confess that God is to be loved above all things, equally obliges us to conceive supreme hatred of sin. That the love of God is to be preferred before all things, so much so that not even to save our lives is it lawful to sin, is expressly declared by our Saviour's words: *He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*;[4] and: *whosoever will save his life shall lose it.*[5]

(*c*) It should also be observed that, as St. Bernard attests, there is no limit or measure to Charity ("the measure," he says, "of loving God is to love Him without measure"); so, in like manner, there should be no limit to hatred of sin.

But not only must contrition be supreme—it must also be so keen and deep as to exclude all apathy and indifference. In the book of Deuteronomy it is written: *When thou shalt seek*

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[1] Joel ii. 12. [2] Deut. vi. 5. [3] Joel ii. 12. [4] Matt. x. 37. [5] Matt. xvi. 25.

the Lord thy God thou shalt find Him; yet so if thou seek Him with all thy heart and all the affliction of thy soul; [1] and in Jeremias: *You shall seek Me and shall find Me, when you shall seek Me with all your heart; and I will be found by you, saith the Lord.* [2]

28. — Imperfect contrition is real contrition.

But even though we are not able to succeed in making our contrition perfect, it may nevertheless be true and efficacious. It often happens that those things which affect the senses touch us more closely than spiritual things. Thus people sometimes feel a keener sense of sorrow for the death of their children than for the filthiness of their sins. A similar conclusion should be drawn even when we find that tears do not accompany the bitterness of sorrow. Tears are indeed highly desirable and commendable in penance, and admirable are the words of St. Augustine in reference to this point: "You have not the bowels of Christian charity, if you bewail the body from which the soul has departed, while you weep not for the soul from which God has departed." Our Saviour's words already quoted bear on this point: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sack-cloth and ashes.*[3] To establish this truth, however, it will suffice to recall the celebrated examples of the Ninivites, of David, of the woman taken in adultery, of the Prince of the Apostles, all of whom implored the mercy of God in abundant tears, and thereby obtained pardon of their sins.

29. — Contrition must extend to each and every mortal sin committed.

The faithful should be very particularly exhorted and admonished to endeavour to form a distinct act of contrition for each mortal sin. It is thus that Ezechias describes contrition. He says: *I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.*[4] Now to recount all his years means to examine his sins one by one, in order to be sorry for them from the bottom of his heart. In Ezechiel also we read: *If the wicked do penance for all his sins he shall live.* [5] It is in this sense that St. Augustine writes: "Let the sinner examine the quality of his sins with reference to the circumstances of time, place, variety, and person."

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[1] Deut. iv. 29. [2] Jer. xxix. 13, 14. [3] Matt. xi, 21. [4] Is. xxxviii. 15.
[5] Ezech. xviii. 21.

30.—Sometimes it is enough to detest one's in general.

Let the faithful, however, never despair of the infinite goodness and clemency of God who, in His fatherly love, being, as He is, most desirous of our salvation, never delays in offering us pardon but embraces the sinner as soon as he enters into himself, turns to the Lord, and detests all his sins in general, with the resolution to recall them singly to mind and detest them, later on, one by one, as far as he can. It is thus that the Lord Himself, by the mouth of His prophet, orders us to hope when He says: *The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.*[1]

31. — Conditions requisite for true contrition.

From what has been said thus far, it will be easy to see the conditions that are most requisite for true contrition. Regarding these conditions the faithful should be carefully instructed so that each one may know the means of attaining it, and may have a standard by which to decide as to what extent he is removed from the perfection of this virtue:—

(*a*) First of all we must hate and detest all our sins. If we repent of only some of them our repentance would be rightly deemed, not salutary, but feigned and false. As St. James has written: *Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all.*[2]

(*b*) In the second place our contrition must include the intention of confessing and of making satisfaction—two points to be dealt with in the proper place.

(*c*) In the third place the penitent must have a fixed and firm purpose of amending his life. On this point we have the clear teaching of the Prophet: *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live and shall not die; I will not remember all his iniquities which he hath done;*[3] and a little further on he adds: *Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit;* while to the woman taken in adultery our Lord Himself gave this direction: *Go thy way and sin no more;*[4] and to the paralytic whom He had cured at the pool of Bethsaida, He said: *Behold, thou art made whole—sin no more.*[5]

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[1] Ezech. xxxiii. 12. [2] James ii. 10. [3] Ezech. xviii. 21, 22. [4] John viii. 11. [5] John v. 14.

32.—Reason for these conditions.

That these two conditions—sorrow for past sin and the firm resolution of avoiding future sin—are absolutely necessary to contrition is clearly proved by nature and by reason itself. He who desires to be reconciled to his friend whom he has injured, not only must be sorry for having injured and offended him, but along with this must also take good care for the future not to sever the bonds of friendship in any way. Furthermore, these two conditions necessarily claim obedience—man is bound to obey the law to which he is subject, be that law natural or divine or human law. Hence, if the penitent has, by force or fraud, robbed his neighbour of anything, he is bound to restitution; if by word or deed he has injured anyone in his good name or reputation, he is bound to repair the injury by procuring him some advantage or rendering him some service. The Dictum of St. Augustine is as trite as it is well-known: "The sin is not forgiven until what has been taken away is restored."

33. — Contrition must also be accompanied by forgiveness of injuries.

Among the conditions highly requisite to contrition, that of remitting and pardoning unreservedly all the injuries we have received from others must not be regarded as less important or less necessary Our Lord and Saviour thus declares and inculcates: *If you forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your offences; but if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your sins.*[1]

Such, then, are the conditions to be observed by the faithful in the matter of contrition. The remaining dispositions can easily be set forth by the pastor, and though they render contrition more perfect and complete in its kind, they are not to be deemed of such strict necessity as by their absence to involve the absence of true and salutary penance.

VIII.—THE EFFECTS OF CONTRITION AND THE MEANS TO EXCITE IT

34.—Efficacy and utility of contrition.

It is not enough for the pastor to set forth the obligations pertaining to the work of salvation. He must also labour with unstinted care and industry to lead the faithful to conform their lives and actions to the rule laid down for them; and, consequently it will be highly advantageous frequently to expound the efficacy and effects of contrition. Most other works of piety, such, for instance, as kindness towards the poor, fasting, prayer, and such like holy and commendable practices, are, through the fault of those who perform them, sometimes rejected by God; but contrition can never be other than dear and pleasing to Him: *A contrite and humble heart,* says the Prophet, *Thou wilt not, O God, despise.*[1] And not only this, but another passage of the same prophet declares that no sooner have we conceived this contrition in our hearts than remission of our sins is at once bestowed on us by God. *I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin.*[2] We have also a figure of this truth in the ten lepers who were sent by our Lord to the priests, and who were cured of their leprosy before they had reached them,[3] thus giving us to see that the efficacy of true contrition, as we have described it, is such that through it we at once obtain from God the pardon of our sins.

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[1] Matt. vi. 14, 15.

35.—Means to excite contrition.

To move the faithful to contrition, it will be well for the pastor to indicate a method of exciting contrition. They should, then, be exhorted to examine their consciences frequently and see if they have faithfully observed the commandments of God and the precepts of His Church; and should anyone find himself guilty of any sin he should accuse himself of it without delay, and suppliantly beg pardon of God, imploring time to confess and make satisfaction; above all, he should beseech the assistance of divine grace to enable him for the future to avoid falling into those sins which he now earnestly deplores having committed.

The pastor will also take care to inspire the faithful with a supreme hatred of sin, both because of its filthiness and baseness, and because of the unutterable losses and calamities it involves; for it alienates God's friendship, from which we have received the choicest blessings, and from which we might well hope to obtain still choicer blessings; and along with this it consigns us to eternal death and unending torment.

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[1] Ps. l. 19.

[2] Ps. xxxi. 5.

[3] Luke xvii. 14.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—*Continued*

3. Examination of Conscience

Q. What is the examination of conscience?

A. The examination of conscience is a diligent search for the sins committed since the last good confession.

Q. How is the examination of conscience made?

A. The examination of conscience is made by carefully calling to mind before God all the sins committed, but not confessed, in thought, word, deed and omission, against the Commandments of God and the Church, and against the duties of our state.

Q. On what else should we examine ourselves?

A. We should also examine ourselves on our bad habits and on the occasions of sin.

Q. In our examination should we also try to discover the number of our sins?

A. In our examinations we should also try to discover the number of our mortal sins.

Q. What is required for a sin to be mortal?

A. For a sin to be mortal three things are required: grave matter, full advertence, and perfect consent of the will.

Q. When is the matter to be considered grave?

A. The matter is grave when the thing under examination is seriously contrary to the laws of God and His Church.

Q. When is there full advertence in sinning?

A. Full advertence in sinning is had when we know perfectly well that we are doing a serious evil.

Q. When is perfect consent of the will verified in sinning?

A. Perfect consent of the will is verified in sinning when we deliberately determine to do a thing although we know that thing to be sinful.

Q. What diligence should be used in the examination of conscience?

A. In the examination of conscience the same diligence is demanded as is used in a matter of great importance.

Q. How much time should be spent in the examination of conscience?

A. More or less time should be spent in the examination of conscience according to the needs of each case, that is, according to the number or kind of sins that burden the conscience and according to the time that has elapsed since the last good confession.

Q. How may the examination of conscience be rendered easy?

A. The examination of conscience is rendered easy by making an examination of conscience every evening upon the actions of the day.

4. Sorrow

Q. What is sorrow for sin?

A. Sorrow for sin consists in grief of soul and in a sincere detestation of the offence offered to God.

Q. How many kinds of sorrow are there?

A. Sorrow is of two kinds: perfect sorrow, or contrition; and imperfect sorrow, or attrition.

Q. What is perfect sorrow or contrition?

A. Perfect sorrow is a grief of soul for having offended God because He is infinitely good and worthy of being loved for His own sake.

Q. Why do you call the sorrow of contrition perfect sorrow?

A. I call the sorrow of contrition perfect sorrow for two reasons: (1) Because it considers the goodness of God alone and not our own advantage or loss; (2) Because it enables us at once to obtain pardon for sins, even though the obligation to confess them still remains.

Q. Perfect sorrow, then, obtains us pardon of our sins independently of confession?

A. Perfect sorrow does not obtain us pardon of our sins independently of confession, because it always includes the intention to confess them.

Q. Why does perfect sorrow or contrition produce the effect of restoring us to the grace of God?

A. Perfect sorrow or contrition produces this effect, because it proceeds from charity which cannot exist in the soul together with sin.

Q. What is imperfect sorrow or attrition?

A. Imperfect sorrow or attrition is that by which we repent of having offended God because He is our Supreme Judge, that is, for fear of the chastisement deserved in this life or in the life to come, or because of the very foulness of sin itself.

Q. What qualities must sorrow have to be true sorrow?

A. Sorrow in order to be true must have four qualities: It must be *internal*, *supernatural*, *supreme*, and *universal*.

Q. What is meant by saying that sorrow must be *internal?*

A. It means that it must exist in the heart and will, and not in words alone.

Q. Why must sorrow be *internal?*

A. Sorrow must be *internal* because the will, which has been alienated from God by sin, must return to God by detesting the sin committed.

Q. What is meant by saying that sorrow must be *supernatural?*

A. It means that it must be excited in us by the grace of God and conceived through motives of faith.

Q. Why must sorrow be *supernatural?*

A. Sorrow must be *supernatural* because the end to which it is directed is supernatural, namely, God's pardon, the acquisition of sanctifying grace, and the right to eternal glory.

Q. Explain more clearly the difference between natural and supernatural sorrow.

A. He who repents of having offended God because God is infinitely good and worthy of being loved for His own sake; of having lost Heaven and merited hell; or because of the intrinsic malice of sin, has *supernatural* sorrow, since all these are motives of faith. On the contrary, he who repents only because of the dishonour or chastisement inflicted by men, or because of some purely temporal loss, has a *natural* sorrow, since he repents from human motives alone.

Q. Why must sorrow be *supreme ?*

A. Sorrow must be *supreme* because we must look upon and hate sin as the greatest of all evils, being as it is an offence against God.

Q. To have sorrow for sin, is it necessary to weep, as we sometimes do in consequence of the misfortunes of this life ?

A. It is not necessary to shed tears of sorrow for our sins; it is enough if in our heart we make more of having offended God than of any other misfortune whatsoever.

Q. What is meant by saying that sorrow must be *universal ?*

A. It means that it must extend to every mortal sin committed.

Q. Why should sorrow extend to every mortal sin committed ?

A. Because he who does not repent of even one mortal sin still remains an enemy to God.

Q. What should we do to have sorrow for our sins ?

A. To have sorrow for our sins we should ask it of God with our whole heart, and excite it in ourselves by the thought of the great evil we have done by sinning.

Q. What should you do to excite yourself to detest your sins ?

A. To excite myself to detest my sins (1) I will consider the rigour of the infinite justice of God and the foulness of sin which has defiled my soul and made me worthy of the eternal punishment of hell; (2) I will consider that by sin I have lost the grace, friendship and sonship of God and the inheritance of Heaven; (3) That I have offended my Redeemer who died for me and that my sins caused His death; (4) That I have despised my Creator and my God, that I have turned my back upon Him who is my Supreme Good and worthy of being loved above everything else and of being faithfully served.

Q. In going to confession should we be extremely solicitous to have a true sorrow for our sins ?

A. In going to confession we should certainly be very solicitous to have a true sorrow for our sins, because this is of all things the most important; and if sorrow is wanting the confession is no good.

Q. If one has only venial sins to confess, must he be sorry for all of them ?

A. If one has only venial sins to confess it is enough to repent of some of them for his confession to be valid; but to obtain pardon of all of them it is necessary to repent of all he remembers having committed.

Q. If one has only venial sins to confess and if he does not repent of even one of them, does he make a good confession ?

A. If one confesses only venial sins without having sorrow for at least one of them, his confession is in vain; moreover it would be sacrilegious if the absence of sorrow was conscious.

Q. What should be done to render the confession of only venial sins more secure ?

A. To render the confession of venial sins more secure it is prudent also to confess with true sorrow some grave sin of the past, even though it has been already confessed.

Q. Is it well to make an act of contrition often ?

A. It is well and most useful to make an act of contrition often, especially before going to sleep, or when we know we have or fear we have fallen into mortal sin, in order to recover God's grace as soon as possible; and this practice will make it easier for us to obtain from God the grace of making a like act at the time of our greatest need, that is, when in danger of death.

5. RESOLUTION OF SINNING NO MORE

Q. In what does a good resolution consist?

A. A good resolution consists in a determined will not to commit sin for the future and to use all necessary means to avoid it.

Q. What conditions should a resolution have in order to be good?

A. A resolution in order to be good should have three principal conditions: It ought to be *absolute*, *universal*, and *efficacious*.

Q. What is meant by an *absolute* resolution?

A. It means that the resolution ought to be without any restrictions of time, place or person.

Q. What is meant by a *universal* resolution?

A. It means that we should avoid all mortal sins, both those already committed as well as those which we can possibly commit.

Q. What is meant by an *efficacious* resolution?

A. It means that there must be a determined will to lose everything rather than commit another sin; to avoid the dangerous occasions of sin; to stamp out our bad habits; and to discharge the obligations that may have been contracted in consequence of our sins.

Q. What is meant by a bad habit?

A. By a bad habit is meant an acquired disposition to fall easily into those sins to which we have become accustomed.

Q. What must be done to correct bad habits?

A. To correct bad habits we must watch over ourselves, pray much, go often to confession, have one good director, and put into practice the counsels and remedies which he gives us.

Q. What is meant by dangerous occasions of sin?

A. By dangerous occasions of sin are meant all those circumstances of time, place, person, or things, which, of their very nature or because of our frailty, lead us to commit sin.

Q. Are we strictly bound to shun dangerous occasions?

A. We are strictly bound to shun those dangerous occasions which ordinarily lead us to commit mortal sin, and which are called the proximate occasions of sin.

Q. What should a person do who cannot avoid a certain occasion of sin?

A. A person who cannot avoid a certain occasion of sin should lay the matter before his confessor and follow his advice.

Q. What considerations will help us to make a good resolution?

A. The same considerations help us to make a good resolution as are efficacious in exciting sorrow; that is, a consideration of the motives we have to fear God's justice and to love His infinite goodness.

Nineteenth Instruction on the Sacraments

NECESSITY OF CONTRITION

After the general observations I have already made on the nature of the sacrament of Penance, I now pass on to speak of the dispositions requisite to receive it properly.

Unhappy as is our state when our conscience reproaches us of grave sin, yet in the midst of our misfortune we have the consolation of knowing that in the sacrament of Penance we have a remedy for all our wounds. But if that remedy—that only and indispensable remedy—is made poisonous or useless to us; if we have reason to fear not only regarding the sins we have committed, but also regarding the very confessions which are destined to efface them, this assuredly is the greatest of all misfortunes—a great misfortune if we are conscious of it, greater still if we are not; because in that case we foolishly imagine we are safe, whereas we are in a state of perdition. Listen, then, to what has to be done to receive the sacrament of Penance validly and with fruit.

From your very childhood you were taught that there are five things necessary towards a good Confession,—examination of conscience, contrition, a firm purpose of sinning no more, confession, and finally, satisfaction. This order would demand that I should begin with the explanation of the Examination of Conscience; and in practice you should always make it before beginning to excite contrition, the reason being that the knowledge of your sins which is thus acquired conduces much to their detestation. I purpose, however, to speak first on sorrow for sin and on the resolution of amendment, both of which conjointly constitute what we call *Contrition,* and I do so for two reasons:—

1. To avoid the almost inevitable necessity of repeating the same things, owing to the close connexion that exists between a diligent examination of conscience and a sincere confession of sin. The best place consequently to speak of the examination will be when I come to explain Confession.

2. Because contrition is the most important part of the sacrament of Penance, and that which ensures all the other parts. Take a person who is truly contrite, and do you think he will be wanting

in attention in examining his conscience or in sincerity in confessing his sins? Certainly not. All the defects, restrictions, reservations, evasions, concealments, impositions, and studied deceptions have no other source than the want of sincere contrition. And hence, the Council of Trent, while reducing the acts of the penitent to three, which three, however, embrace the five already mentioned, commences with contrition. It is with contrition, then, that I commence.

Contrition, according to the same Council, is " a heart-felt sorrow and detestation of sin with a firm resolution of sinning no more;" hence it contains two parts: *sorrow* for the past, and a *purpose* for the future.

To show us the importance of contrition thus understood, the Council adds that " it holds the first place amongst the acts of the penitent." The accusation of sin in confession is also an act required of the penitent, but it is not so rigorously necessary as contrition; nay, according to the teaching of theologians, if confession is not accompanied by sorrow it cannot even be called sacramental confession at all.

And in fact, contrition can make up for the absence of confession, but confession can never supply the place of contrition. It may occasionally happen that a sinner is sufficiently disposed for absolution without having made any examination of conscience, and without having told his sins one by one to the priest; but it has never happened and it never can happen that a penitent is ready and disposed for absolution without having repented of his sins. This as I have already said is, and always has been, an indispensable condition—a condition from which even God Himself cannot dispense us, because it is inexorably demanded by His infinite holiness, and by the infinite and irreconcilable hatred He bears to sin, and even to the sinner as long as he retains his affection to sin.

This absolutely indispensable necessity should make us alive to two rather common illusions.

1. The first illusion is that of those who devote much time to discovering their faults, who are distressed and cast down overmuch by them, yet at the same time take little trouble to excite themselves to contrition, and pass over this point lightly and superficially. In acting thus they plainly give preference to what is less important. And in fact, of what use are the most careful examination and the most minute declaration of sins, if contrition which is more essential, and at the same time more difficult, is absent?

If, owing to grave negligence, contrition is consciously defective the confession is sacrilegious; and even if there is no negligence at all, the confession will be always null and void, since contrition is called the matter as it were of this sacrament. For it is quite possible for you to believe you have contrition, without really having it. Now, in this case, what happens? Your good faith may indeed exempt you from sacrilege, but it cannot make up for the absence of the matter requisite for the validity of the sacrament; hence the sacrament will be always invalid. In a word contrition is as essential to Penance as water is to Baptism—without water there is no Baptism; and even were you through no fault of your own to use any other liquid under the impression that it is water, you would not, it is true, commit a sin, but there would be no Baptism. It is precisely the same with contrition—if it is absent even through no fault of yours, the sacrament is null because it is not enough to believe you have it; you must actually possess it.

It is precisely this point, someone may say, that is the source of much doubt and uneasiness to me. Who can assure me that my past confessions have not been wanting in the requisite contrition? It is true no one can assure you of this absolutely; but you should rest assured, as theologians teach, that if you have done your best with the help of God to excite yourself to contrition you may trust freely to His divine mercy. In any event, you should remember that if your past contrition has been insufficient, the defect can be now remedied by future confessions, provided only that you do your best, are really contrite, and invincibly ignorant of the insufficiency of contrition in previous confessions; and provided also you are under the impression that you were validly absolved on previous occasions, because of the fact that you imagined you had neglected nothing to excite yourself to true contrition. Hence it is highly useful to excite ourselves to contrition not only for the faults committed since our last confession and which we are now about to confess, but also for all the sins committed during the whole course of our lives; in this way each confession will supply for the unconscious defects of all preceding confessions.

2. Coming now to the second illusion—of those, that is, who confess frequently and having only venial sins to confess take but little trouble to excite themselves to contrition, precisely because they are guilty of only venial sins—the first remark to be made is that it would be better to approach Holy Communion without going to Confession at all than to go to Confession after this manner.

In the next place, what authority have we for believing that the smallness of our sin dispenses us from having the requisite contrition for it in the sacrament of Penance? True, indeed, we are not bound to confess venial sins, since they can be effaced otherwise than by confession. But—and very justly so—as often as we desire to efface them by means of the sacrament we must conceive sorrow and detestation of them, and the firm resolution of amendment, because such is the proximate matter of the sacrament; and consciously failing in this of our own fault we stand in the way of the efficacy of the sacrament. It should, then, cause no surprise that so many persons always remain with the same imperfections, always in the same tepid course of life. The reason is that in thus frequenting the sacrament through custom and routine their souls never derive therefrom that fruit which is derived more or less securely and abundantly by those who approach with a sincere desire of amending their lives and attaining perfection.

Let us, then, have recourse to the sacrament of Penance to cleanse ourselves from our lighter faults and thus obtain interior purity more easily; but at the same time let us be careful to repent of these faults, or at least of those of them that are more serious. It is necessary to detest each and every mortal sin, since one of them cannot be remitted without the others, but as regards venial sins it is advisable to excite contrition for and detestation of those of them that are more serious and deliberate. To ensure the validity of the sacrament, spiritual writers usually recommend us to add to the accusation of our ordinary faults some grave sin of our past lives as a help to excite ourselves more easily to hatred of sin. It is an excellent practice, though possibly that suggested by St. Francis de Sales is better still. Instead of accusing ourselves of some particular sin of the past, it consists in accusing ourselves of some particular species of past sin, such, for instance, as "all the sins committed against purity, or charity," and so on. All this, however, ought not to be allowed to dispense us from contrition for daily faults, which at the very least should be discontinued, because they are always an offence against God, are always hateful to Him, and can always be the source of baneful consequences to the soul.

After these general observations on the necessity of contrition, I now proceed to examine the two parts of which it is composed—sorrow for the past and purpose of amendment for the future.

The Protestant reformers attempted to limit contrition to the simple resolution of sinning no more and beginning a new life, thus completely excluding the necessity of sorrow for sins committed. Their error has been solemnly condemned by the Church, simply because sorrow for the past and purpose of amendment are inseparable—as there can be no true sorrow for the past without purpose of amendment, so, likewise, there can be no purpose of amendment without sorrow for the past. He who is still ready to commit sin has no sorrow for the past; and in the same way he who is not sorry for the sins he has committed cannot be regarded as determined to renounce sin for the future. Leaving aside, for the present, the resolution of amendment which will be examined later on I now turn to explain the nature of sorrow for sin.

What sort, precisely, is this sorrow? You will at once answer, that it is a sorrow springing from the heart. And from what heart? —from the material and fleshly heart you carry within your breast? By no means; but from the spiritual heart. The Council of Trent calls it sorrow of the soul, or an act of the will detesting the sin committed; feeling affliction, sadness, and remorse on account of it; and retracting it efficaciously by wishing as far as possible that it had never been committed.

This is not hard to understand—it is even a matter of daily and hourly experience. Thus, for example, if you find you have imprudently entered on some dangerous undertaking, if you have made some false step, if you are implicated in some course of action that brings you dishonour, humiliation, or loss in business, what happens? Sorrow enters into you, causes you to look with aversion on that undertaking, action, or business, fills you with remorse and indignation against yourself, and makes you sincerely wish you had never undertaken it. Now such precisely is the disposition aroused in us by sorrow for sin—a disposition of detestation, regret, retractation—three elements which constitute but one single act of penance, and which are clearly distinct from, though closely resembling each other.

1. *Detestation* arises from reflection on the enormity of the evil of sin considered in its nature and in itself. Even innocent souls experience this detestation, though properly speaking they cannot repent of the sins they have never committed.

2. Furthermore, considering the great malice of sin as actually existing in our souls and committed by us, we experience *regret*, affliction, and remorse for having committed it.

3. Finally from hatred and regret springs *retractation*, if not in fact at least in will and intention. Once a sinful act has been committed, it is no longer possible to undo it; but though we cannot retract it in fact, we can retract by a will and intention so disposed that even if the occasion of committing sin were to present itself, we shall not commit it, and if it were in our power to destroy it we should destroy it. And this resolution, even though it regards an impossible act, does not cease thereby to possess its merit in the sight of God who considers our intentions and the dispositions of our hearts, not only in reference to merit, but also to demerit.

Let me here refer to a point on which I shall have occasion to dwell at greater length later on. If the desire of destroying the evil done is sincere, it should lead us to make efficacious use of every means of accomplishing its object.

Thus if we cannot destroy sin in itself, we can at least destroy it by destroying the causes that have led to it and that still remain. Away, then, with evil occasions of every kind,—whether arising from friends, amusements, companions, public-houses, resorts of unrestraint and disorder,—so that for the future they may not be a source of sin to us as they have been in the past. Away with them. Otherwise how can we reconcile the wish not to have sinned, with the wish to remain voluntarily in the neighbourhood of sin, and in the midst of the causes that lead to sin, and in the proximate danger of committing sin?

In like manner, if I cannot destroy sin in itself, I can destroy it in the baneful consequences resulting from it, and which still remain and constitute a part of the sin itself. Hence the necessity of reparation for the scandal we may have given; compensation for the injuries we may have inflicted; restitution, reconciliation with our enemies, and pardon for the injuries we have received. Otherwise how reconcile the will to destroy sin with the will to permit its evil consequences to remain?

This would be the proper place to put before your eyes the character and quality that should distinguish sorrow, according to the general teaching of theologians and catechists—qualities calculated to obviate the principal defects that can vitiate it or deprive us of the grace of the sacrament. These defects are four in number, as are the qualities opposed to them.

Contrition can be defective first of all in its substance, that is, by not existing in the heart and will, and hence it is that we say contrition must be *interior.* In the second place it can be defective in the motive that leads to it, that is when this motive is merely natural and human and not inspired by faith, and hence we say that contrition must be *supernatural.* In the third place, it can be defective in its extent, that is when it does not extend to all one's sins without reserve or exception, and hence we say it must be *universal.* Finally, it can be defective in degree, that is when it does not reach the point it should, and this is why we say contrition must be *supreme.*

Such, then, are the qualities indispensably necessary to contrition. I merely refer to them just now, as I shall have occasion to return to them at greater length in our next and future instructions.

Twentieth Instruction on the Sacraments

INTERIOR CONTRITION

To understand still better the nature of that interior contrition which, as I explained in our last instruction, is indispensably necessary to the sacrament of Penance, I must not omit to describe the notes and qualities with which it should be accompanied, according to the unanimous teaching of writers on sacred subjects. These I have already enumerated in our last instruction, wherein I pointed out that they are four. Contrition must be *interior*, *supernatural*, *universal*, and *supreme*—four qualities I now come to examine one by one.

1. Beginning with the first, contrition cannot be interior if it does not dwell in the heart, that is, in the will. Hence it is described by the Council of Trent as *sorrow of soul*, or heartfelt sorrow; while Sacred Scripture calls it a conversion, a return of the heart to God: *Be converted to me with all your heart.*[1] Since contrition is intended to repair the evil of sin, it must be applied to the seat of the evil. Now, in what precisely does the evil of sin consist? It consists, precisely, in an evil heart and an evil will. The will it is that conceives the sin, that delights in, and is pleased with the sin, and by sin is estranged from God. It is, then, but just that it should feel the bitterness and pain of sin. All crimes, as Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel, spring from the heart: *From the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies*[2]—from the heart, then, it is that contrition should spring: a contrition—bear this well in mind, for this is the important point—a contrition correcting and reproving our perverted and depraved will; producing in us a complete change of affections; and making us hate the sin which we had previously loved, and love the law of God which we had previously hated in deed if not in word. Yes, within me, when I conceive an act of contrition, there must take place such a change in my affections that what heretofore seemed sweet and pleasant becomes bitter and distasteful to me. In this way alone can there be that true contrition and sincere conversion by which are formed within us that new heart and that new spirit of which Ezechiel speaks: *Make*

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[1] Joel ii. 12.

[2] Matt. xv. 19.

to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit:[1] in this way alone we restore to God the glory of which we deprived Him when sinning; and destroy and annihilate the malice of the sin itself. This, then, is what is meant by *interior* contrition.

Now, if all this is true, let us for the future reject those various classes of contrition which spring from some other source and are nothing more than downright shams, simply because they do not possess the first requisite quality of contrition. The better to succeed I now proceed to enumerate the various classes of persons who say they repent of their sins but who really do not repent.

For some, repentance is nothing more than a matter of words, of phrases, of the lips and not of the heart. After having examined their consciences, they set themselves to recite some form of contrition which they have learned by heart or which they find in a prayer-book, and with this they consider themselves sufficiently prepared. But I should like to ask them: Is your heart penetrated with the sentiments you express with your lips, and do you feel it truly changed or no? If you answer, *Yes*, I cannot contradict you, and I have nothing to say to the contrary; but if your heart is not moved and penetrated, if it remains hard and insensible, you may repeat as many acts of contrition as you will, and you will have recited them without ever once feeling real contrition in the true sense of the word.

Such an illusion as this does not seem possible, and yet it is very common; indeed its existence may be gathered from the mode of speech used in connexion with this matter. For observe, when in our ordinary language we speak of a person who repents of some bad deed we say that he has sorrow or contrition for it; while when we speak of repentance for sin we say that he makes an act of contrition or sorrow for it, as if sorrow was something merely mechanical, instead of being as it is a sentiment, an emotion, a heartfelt affection. Does not our very language then show that contrition for sin may be regarded as a mere formality and nothing more? When you come to Confession I do not ask you whether you have made an act of contrition, but whether you really are filled with sorrow for having offended God—a sorrow that may exist without uttering a single syllable, but which, on the other hand, can be absent in spite of all the empty protestations in the world. And even if, acting on your request, I suggest an act of contrition to you, and you repeat it accurately after me, you cannot rest content with this if your heart is not really penetrated by contrition itself.

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[1] Ezech. xviii. 31.

Not that I desire to deprecate the value or use of the forms in question; I even consider them useful and advantageous, because they help to suggest thoughts, sentiments, and reflections, to supply for our deficiency in this respect; but you must render them yours in such a way as to make them the true expression of the sentiments that fill your heart. To utter them with the lips is not sufficient; but it is quite another thing to penetrate the heart with them and fill it with new inclinations and affections; yet without this, mere empty protestations are useless. We ourselves take no account of exterior professions, or even tears, when we know they do not come from the heart; how, then, can we imagine that God will take account of them, and be more indulgent to them than we ourselves are?

There are others who on the pretext of a certain feeling of tenderness and sensibility which they feel within themselves, and which easily leads them to break forth into sighs and tears, flatter themselves they have contrition. But not even this is enough to prove that they are truly repentant. Sensible emotion does indeed afford a presumption of interior sorrow, but is far from being an infallible proof, for while it may be found along with true sorrow, it may also be nothing more than a mask for false sorrow. It is indeed desirable and good; but it is by no means necessary, while of its very nature it is at best a fallible and untrustworthy witness of sorrow. These three qualifications are important, and need explanation.

1. Sensible emotion is desirable and good when it is a consequence, an effect, an outcome of interior contrition, as it really was in the case of many pentients mentioned in Holy Scripture; a David, for instance, who every night bathed his royal couch with his tears in consciousness of his sins: *I will water my couch with my tears*;[1] a Peter whose cheeks were furrowed by the bitter tears that continually trickled down them: *My eyes have sent forth springs of water, because they have not kept Thy law*;[2] a Magdalene, who, prostrate at the feet of Jesus in the house of the Pharisee, bathed His feet with her tears; and many others. These were true tears of repentance—tears precious and dear to God; and why? Because they came from the heart, and from a heart sorely oppressed by the consciousness of having offended God. And hence it is that Jesus Christ in declaring to Magdalene that her sins were forgiven her, attributes this effect not to her tears, but to the loving interior disposition that had produced them: *Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much.*[3] Oh, happy we could we only weep our faults like this!

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[1] Ps. vi. 7.

[2] Ps. cxviii. 136.

[3] Luke vii. 47.

2. But though desirable and good, this sensible contrition or emotion is not necessary, simply because even without it our sorrow can be very real and very intense, as was the case with St. Paul, with the good thief, and with many others concerning whom we do not read that they shed a single tear, or broke into a single sigh, yet they were admirable models of penance. And truly, for sorrow being as the Council of Trent explains an interior and hidden act of the will or soul, it can exist in all its intensity without a single trace of it being exteriorly manifest.

Not only this, but it not infrequently happens that interior sorrow when very deep and intense, oppresses the soul, arrests every exterior manifestation of itself, and remains concentrated in the depths of the heart. Of this we have an example in the Blessed Virgin standing at the foot of the Cross. She felt the most piercing sorrow—a sorrow more intense than any that can be felt by any other creature—at the sight of the agony and death of her Son; and yet according to the common opinion of the Fathers, her grief, though supreme, found no utterance in tears, or sighs, or swoons. "I read that she stood," says St. Ambrose, "but I nowhere read that she wept." And even if this was the effect of a heroic will and a character inaccessible to natural affections, it nevertheless cannot on that account be said that she experienced no grief.

Let this example serve both for the instruction and consolation of those pious though over-timid souls who, when exciting themselves to contrition in preparation for Confession, fear they have not sufficient sorrow on the ground that they experience no sensible emotion, but on the contrary feel their heart remains cold, dry, and insensible, and who in consequence of this either do not dare to approach the sacrament of Penance, or do so with great reluctance, and full of uneasiness and anxiety, fearing to profane the sacrament and soil their souls with sacrilege. Let such souls as these take courage from the reflection that the sincerity of sorrow is not to be judged by intensity of feeling or sentiment which does not depend on our own will, and without which true sorrow can perfectly subsist. And even if these souls do desire some token of their contrition, they will find a most sure and solid one in the habitual horror they entertain towards sin, in their fidelity to God, and in their perseverance in good in spite of every sacrifice. These are indeed no uncertain tokens of a true disposition, and are far more reliable than any or all of the manifestations of sensible sorrow.

3. Just, however, as the absence of sensible emotions is no proof that our sorrow is defective, so, on the other hand, their presence is not sufficient proof for believing we have that sorrow, since

they may very well exist side by side with actual affection to sin, as was the case with Esau, Antiochus, Saul, Achab, and others, who exhibited great demonstrations of penance without being in the least really contrite. And hence it is that to undeceive persons of this class I add in the third place that these sensible emotions are at best but doubtful and unreliable signs of contrition, because they very often spring from nature, or temperament, or from some source other than true sorrow.

And in fact there are certain persons so fashioned and disposed by nature that they cannot meditate on one of the great truths, hear a sermon, or read a pious book, without at once being melted and moved to tears. Thus, when preparing for Confession they feel keen remorse, and a strong impulse to abandon sin and change their lives; satisfied with these pious affections, they stop short, and pay no further attention to detestation of sin, imagining they have already conceived it. It is far otherwise. In the bottom of their heart affection for sin lies hidden, and all its malice still lives on; and it is for this very reason that they repent after a fashion and go to Confession without ever amending—to the tribunal of Penance they carry the same tears in their eyes and the same sins in their hearts. They may well be compared to that class of stone that is sometimes met with which weeps in wet weather and gives forth moisture from every pore; you would sometimes imagine that it would almost melt, yet it ever remains a stone and a hard stone at that. Thus it is with the persons in question—in the midst of all their sensible devotion which seems to change their very nature and temperament, they remain always the same—hardened just as before and just as closely attached to their bad habits. Who will venture to say that they are animated by true sorrow? Do not, then, be too ready to trust to pious emotions of this kind which often do not change the heart at all nor detach it from affection to sin.

It now remains to consider another class of persons who may be deceived with greater show of reason. I refer to those who, representing to themselves the horrible picture of their lives and their sins, vividly comprehend the filthiness, the ugliness, and the danger of these sins, experience bitter remorse for them, and become uneasy, disconsolate, abashed, and filled with confusion; and in consequence of all these sentiments they consider themselves changed and contrite. Yet, even here delusion is quite possible.

It is one thing to understand the horror and danger of your condition, and quite another thing to detest that condition sincerely. The former is an act of the intellect, the latter of the will; the former leads to the latter, but the latter is not always found united to the former. Who is ignorant that our will is often stubborn and resists all the lights, the maxims, and the persuasions of the intellect? We thoroughly see, understand, and approve of the good, and nevertheless we still pursue the bad. Our horror of our condition, then, must not be merely speculative and intellectual—it should penetrate our will in such a way as to detach it from all voluntary affection towards sin.

I say: *Detach it from all affection towards sin*, because, even supposing that this horror of sin is found to exist not only in the intellect, but also penetrates the heart and there begets uneasiness, remorse, sadness, and regret, if these sentiments do not go so far as to destroy all affection towards grave sin they can never produce true sorrow such as God demands as a condition for the grace of the sacrament. Alas! how many there are who thoroughly feel the weight of their sins and who in consequence suffer cruel anguish and remorse, and yet who never succeed in detaching themselves therefrom! How many there are who do indeed wish to do good, but, for all that, without ceasing to do evil!

Be careful, then, to guard against making a mistake regarding the substance of your contrition—it is only too easy to make such a mistake; it is only too easy to confound appearance with reality, the natural horror of sin with true contrition, the desire and the grace of conversion with conversion itself. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that God sometimes permits these illusions in just punishment of sin. Just as the Lord in His mercy often permits the good to experience temptations, suggestions, and inefficacious desires of evil into which they falsely imagine they have fallen, and by this means preserves them humble, fervent, and estranged from danger and consent to sin, and guides them securely to the haven of salvation; so in His justice He permits sinners to feel a certain pain on account of evil, and certain inefficacious attractions and impulses towards good, in consequence of which they wrongly imagine they are converted without being really so, and thus they rest tranquil in their deplorable state, and work out their own damnation.

I have thought it well to insist thus strongly on the first quality that should be possessed by our contrition, because illusion is so easy in this matter, and because the consequences it produces are so fatal. I will bring this subject to a termination by an observation which will, I trust, inspire you with a lively and salutary fear:—

If you accustom yourselves to falsify penance during life, you will falsify it much more readily in death; for at that moment everything will contribute to make you regard as genuine a penance which is nothing more than a natural agitation arising from the distress of illness, the danger to life, and the fear of death. Thus, notwithstanding all the appearances of a good and holy death, some persons die the death of the reprobate in consequence of the absence of sincere contrition. And in fact do not those who survive their illness prove the falsity of such contrition? In proportion as the danger of death recedes, the pious sentiments they had shown, the fine protestations and manifestations they had displayed vanish also, and they no longer wish for the presence of the priest, nor care to hear his exhortations. In a word, hardly have they commenced to recover when they begin to show themselves as badly disposed and as sinfully inclined as ever. We have all been witnesses to something like this at one time or another. Now, what is the real meaning of it? This: As soon as the fear that produced their sentiments vanishes the mask that hides their false contrition is speedily dropped.

It is of the utmost importance, then, to be well assured of the reality and sincerity of contrition when approaching the sacrament of Penance. Search, examine your conscience well, to see how it really stands and whether all attachment to sin is truly destroyed. The Lord Himself has told us: *Thou shalt find the Lord thy God if thou seek Him with all thy heart.*[1] It is sincere contrition like this that decides all, and without it nothing is accomplished. Later on we shall see what are the chief motives and principles of faith with which to excite contrition, and which for the present may be summed up in saying that it must be *supernatural.* When speaking of this second quality of contrition, I shall take occasion to explain the well-known difference between imperfect sorrow or *attrition,* and perfect sorrow or *contrition.*

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[1] Deut. iv. 29.

Twenty-first Instruction on the Sacraments

CONTRITION MUST BE SUPERNATURAL

EVEN though our sorrow for sin proceeds from a heart and a will completely detached from sin, it nevertheless does not suffice for the grace of the sacrament if it is not also conceived on account of the proper motives. As well as being *interior*—a quality already explained—it must in the second place be *supernatural;* for both grace and the remission of sin being supernatural gifts, sorrow which is the proximate disposition towards their attainment must correspond to these effects and be of the same order with them, and consequently it also must be supernatural. Let us now see what this second quality precisely means.

According to the teaching of theologians sorrow must be supernatural in a two-fold sense—that is, both with reference to the motive which excites it in us, and to the principle from which it springs. It must come from God and must be excited in us by His grace—without grace, as our faith teaches, we are of our own nature incapable of conceiving it. On this point, however, we shall have more to say on another occasion. For the present I shall confine my attention to showing that contrition must be supernatural in its motives, that is to say, that it must be inspired by supernatural and not by natural motives.

Let us, first of all, distinguish the motives that inspire sorrow for sin into two classes—*natural* and *supernatural.*

The *natural* motives of repentance are the losses, the inconveniences, the misfortunes that befall us here on earth in consequence of this or that sin, such, for instance, as the loss of honour, riches, or health; the ignominy of vice; the tyranny of the passions; the uneasiness, the sadness, the confusion arising from qualms of conscience and from the remorse that follows on sin. Sorrow conceived on account of these motives is called natural sorrow. Such was the sorrow of Saul, which was inspired altogether by the fear of being lowered in the estimation of the people, and of losing his crown; such was the sorrow of King Antiochus, which was inspired altogether by the desire of being delivered from the fearful misfortunes which the hand of God had inflicted on him; and such also is that of a great number of penitents who present themselves at the sacred tribunal of Penance with tears and sighs, but whose sorrow, on close examination, is clearly found to have no other motive than the adversities and misfortunes inflicted on them by their sins.

Now, if you repent of your sins through any of these motives your repentance may indeed be true and sincere as far as it goes, but it is inadequate. And how many there are who on experiencing within themselves the bitter burthen of their sins curse the day and the hour in which they committed them? But sentiments such as these do not honour God, have no merit in His eyes, and do not obtain pardon for sin, inasmuch as they spring from motives that are not sufficiently elevated, and constitute a merely human sorrow such as might be conceived by a pagan who never even heard the name of God.

I should not, however, go so far as to say that such sentiments are to be despised. They are even very useful and advantageous because they undeceive us with regard to the nature of sin, detach our affections from sin, inspire hatred and horror of sin, and hence pave the way to conversion—does not God Himself make use of temporal misfortunes to induce us to enter into ourselves and lead us to repent? These misfortunes, then, can indeed serve as an impulse to repentance and as an occasion of repentance, but they must not be the only motive of repentance. The prodigal son in the Gospel parable would never have resolved to return to his father, had he not found himself reduced to dire poverty and misery. This indeed supplied the impulse, but it was not the motive of his repentance—the real motive was the goodness of his father whom he had abandoned, and his own unworthy conduct towards that father—a motive he gave expression to in the words: *Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am not worthy to be called thy child.*[1] Let us apply this to the case in question: The injurious and baneful temporal consequences arising from sin can indeed serve as an incitement to return to God, but they must not constitute the whole motive of repentance. While recognizing that the chastisements come from the avenging hand of God, and that their object is our correction and emendation, we should proceed further and detest our sins on account of Him; that is to say, on account of revealed motives—motives known and believed through faith

These motives can be various, according to the various aspects under which faith presents the enormity, the malice, and the dangers of sin. Nevertheless to indicate one motive which embraces and comprehends them all, it will be enough to say that sin should be detested as an offence against God. It was thus that holy David understood it and detested it : *To Thee only have I sinned,*[1] was all he said.

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[1] Luke xv. 18.

Yet as God whom we have offended can be considered both as *good in Himself* on account of His infinite and intrinsic lovablness, and as *good towards us* on account of the fact that He is the first and essential source of all the goods and all the blessings we enjoy ; so from this double point of view arises a two-fold act of sorrow called respectively contrition and attrition—both of which are supernatural, but one of which is better than the other. It is important to note clearly the difference between them, since their efficacy is also different.

If we repent principally through the noble motive of having offended and estranged a God supremely good in Himself, lovable in Himself, and of Himself worthy of ineffably infinite love, this sorrow animated as it is by supernatural charity, that is to say, by pure love of God, is an act of perfect contrition. So pleasing and acceptable is this act to God that it has power to destroy and annihilate all the sins the soul can be guilty of—annihilate them in the twinkling of an eye, and restore the soul at once to the grace of God even before approaching the sacrament of Penance. And in truth it is not possible for a soul to turn to God with love like this without being treated with similar affection by God ; now God's love towards us cannot exist side by side with sin in the soul, and is as we know always accompanied by sanctifying grace : *He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father.*[2] In souls thus disposed takes place a change similar to that which was accomplished in the ten lepers of the Gospel, who, while proceeding in accordance with our Lord's instructions to present themselves before the priests in order to be cured of their leprosy, suddenly found themselves healed and cleansed : *As they went they were made clean.*[3]

Yet, though such is the case, we must not on this account imagine we are dispensed thereby from the obligations of confession. Contrition, if sincere, always includes the intention of confessing our sins. If contrition is sincere it embraces all that is prescribed by the law of God ; and since confession is so prescribed, an act of perfect contrition includes the intention of going to Confession.

But if we excite ourselves to detest our sins because they have offended God regarded as our supreme good ; in other words, because sin deprives us of the grace, friendship, and sonship of God, and of the inheritance of heaven, and leaves us exposed to the unutterable misfortune of eternal damnation, our sorrow is an act of imperfect contrition, or *attrition.* It is called imperfect, not because it is bad or useless, as some of the Protestant reformers impiously maintained, but simply because its motive is less perfect, proceeding as it does from a love of hope or an interested love. Attrition is a supernatural sorrow, a detestation of sin, like contrition, but as a rule it is caused by the consideration of the filthiness of sin, or by the apprehension of the loss of heaven or the punishments of hell. He who has imperfect contrition is sorry for his sins not so much on account of God whom he has offended, as on his own account.

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[1] Ps. l. 6.
[2] John xiv. 21.
[3] Luke xvii. 14.

An example will illustrate the difference between perfect and imperfect contrition. Two children have offended their mother. Both become sorry for their act; but one reasons thus: "I am sorry for having offended my mother, because she is very harsh and is sure to punish me severely; and hence in view of the possible loss I may have to suffer I heartily regret my fault." The other, however, thinking only of the goodness of his mother, and of the displeasure he has caused her by his action, cries out: "I am heartily sorry for my fault, because I have given trouble to my best of mothers, who has ever been so good to me." Both, as we see, are sorry, but the cause and nature of the sorrow are different.

This attrition, however, though of itself insufficient to sanctify us because not perfect enough, nevertheless is sufficient when joined with the sacrament, "provided only that it excludes the will of sinning," as the Council of Trent has explained.

The condition expressed by the Council shows that sorrow inspired by "fear of hell and its punishments," can both exclude and include the will to sin. *It can exclude it*—of no weight, then, is the opinion of those who hold that attrition thus conceived is powerless to change the sinner's will and destroy his affection to sin, and who consequently hold that it is insufficient to produce grace, even when united to the sacrament. The Council's declaration is of more value than all their reasons, especially since we cannot suppose that the Council intended to mention a chimerical condition, or a condition impossible to realize.

But while attrition can exclude affection towards sin it does not always do so, as happens when we repent of our sins through fear of hell, and have in view nothing more than the punishment in itself without hating the malice of sin, and simply because hell exists, so much so that were there no hell we would be ready to sin again. A sorrow such as this, even along with the sacrament, is certainly not enough to obtain pardon of sin; and the reason is, that it is a mercenary and servile sorrow which is quite compatible with affection to sin. He that refrains from doing a certain action merely through fear of being punished would do it if there were no punishment to fear, which implies that in his heart there still abides a bad disposition. The thief and assassin sometimes abstain from their crimes, but it is merely through fear of the prison or the scaffold; but are we on this account to say that they truly hate robbery and murder?

In a word, "thou fearest to burn, and dost not fear to sin," as St. Augustine observes in connexion with this matter; and he confirms his statement by the striking comparison of a wolf prowling round a flock of sheep for the purpose of seizing on one of them, but, frightened by the presence of the shepherd's staff and the barking of his dog, abandons his attempt and runs away in fear. Would you venture to say, asks the Saint, that this wolf has changed his intention or will? Assuredly no; he is always a wolf, greedy for his prey—both when attacking the flock, and when running away. The same must be said of a certain class of penitents. Terrified at the thought of the eternal torments that await them, they renounce sin, but they do so against their will and still continue to cherish in their hearts the desire and intention to sin, provided they can do so with impunity—in a word they would wish there was no hell to hinder them from sinning. Now, can this be called hatred of sin and detachment from sin?

It is one thing, then, merely to fear hell, and quite another thing to resolve through fear of hell to hate sin and the offence done to a just God who punishes sin with an eternal punishment. This second motive is necessary for the efficacy of attrition in the sacrament of Penance.

Leaving aside certain debated questions, and coming down to practice, let us commence with attrition, which is the easiest, and from it let us try to reach contrition, which is more difficult. Their various motives do not mutually exclude each other, but on the contrary assist and help each other. To make an act of perfect contrition, it is not necessary to exclude all idea of our own advantage; but we must not stop short at this—we should comprise in the same act of sorrow both God's goodness towards us, and His own intrinsic and absolute goodness in Himself. Hence, in exciting contrition for sin, I cannot approve of expressions such as "O Lord! I repent of my sins, not because by them I have lost heaven and deserved hell, but because of the offence I have offered Thy infinite goodness." No, that is not the proper way; it is a language that can indeed be sincere in a transport of sublime charity, as was that of many saints who burned with love of God; but for the greater part of mankind it is to be feared that it is a language of the lips alone, and not of the heart.

Let us, then, also repent on account of the eternal happiness we have lost and the eternal punishment we have deserved; but let not this be the only motive of our sorrow—let us rather use it as a ladder to raise ourselves up to a profound sense of the goodness of God, which is ready and disposed to pardon us so great an evil, and endow us with so great a good; in this goodness and in this God let us fix our mind and our heart; and let us bring it about that the God we have offended, the God who is infinitely good in Himself, is the primary and principal motive of our sorrow; and then indeed we shall have perfect contrition.

For the sake of still greater clearness on this important point, let us note the series of acts by which, as by so many steps, we may arrive at perfect sorrow.

After having weighed the number and gravity of our sins, let us begin to stir our soul by the fear of God's judgments, which faith presents to our mind, and let us say within ourselves: "God could have visited me with death in this state! Where, then, would I now be? In the midst of the endless torments of hell: *Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell.*[1] How many there are less guilty than I, who are already plunged therein!"

Then let us reflect that God has borne with us and still bears with us through His pure compassion, because He has merciful views and designs in our regard. *The Lord waiteth that He may have mercy on you.*[2] Oh! how immense is the goodness of God towards me, who am so unworthy! How could I think of offending a God of such infinite goodness? It is thus that the fear of hell, which of itself is not sufficient if it is purely servile to form an act of contrition, begins to touch the heart with some bitterness and sorrow for the offence offered to a God who is so patient, so bountiful, and so full of love for us, a God who, though outraged and offended, still holds out His hands to us and offers us His mercy.

To excite this love and this sorrow more and more in our hearts, let us go on to consider who God is and what He has done for us. What a Father He has been to us? And what kind of children we have been to Him? Let us especially dwell on the great blessing of redemption, and let us call to mind how He came down from heaven, took up His abode amongst us on earth, and died on the tree of the Cross; let us picture Him agonizing on the infamous gibbet, led thereto by the burning desire He had to save us and conduct us to paradise, while all the time He had, and has, no need of us in any way.

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[1] Ps. xciii. 17.

[2] Is. xxx. 18.

These considerations will make us more and more conscious of our unworthy conduct towards that God who is so full of love for us; they will lead us to change our will, inspire us with hatred and abhorrence of sin, and will force us to say within ourselves, "Oh, how great is the evil I have done! Ungrateful that I have been to offend so good a God, so loving a Father! But I am sorry for my sins; I wish I had never committed them; I repent of them with my whole soul, with all my heart."

Thus far, however, we have not yet an act of perfect contrition. But from the consideration of the goodness of God towards us, it will be easy to go still further and call to mind the great goodness of God in Himself, and comprehend how much He desires to be loved for His own sake alone. "If God is so good towards me who am so bad; so loving to me who am so ungrateful, even though He derives no advantage from loving me and doing good to me; is He not a God of the greatest goodness, a goodness without limit or measure? How could I not love Him? Nay, how had I the heart to offend Him so often? Alas! why is not my heart broken with sorrow? No sin for me, O, my God, for the future, but Thy love alone: *Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever*." [1] Such is the contrition that springs from perfect love of God.

Such, then, is the method I recommend in order to make our sorrow as intense and as perfect as possible. And two reasons should induce us to not neglect it.

In the first place, in striving to conceive contrition according to this method, if we do not attain to perfect contrition or perfect charity which justifies us even before approaching the sacrament, we can at least hope to attain and secure that which justifies us along with the sacrament. On the other hand, if we are sparing in our efforts we can easily expose ourselves to the risk of not even having that contrition which suffices for the sacrament.

In the second place, it may easily happen that we find ourselves in danger of death without having an opportunity of confessing our sins, owing to the want of time or the absence of a priest. In such a case the only means available to assure salvation is contrition. But to be able, in case of necessity, to make an act of perfect contrition, it is necessary to accustom ourselves to it, so as to render it as easy as possible in the hour of need.

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[1] Ps. lxxii. 26

Let the fruit, then, of this instruction, be to strive to excite sorrow more and more deeply every time we approach the tribunal of Penance, especially by the reflection and consideration of the goodness of God in Himself, who deserves that we love Him as much as we can. There will thus remain no doubt as to the force of our contrition, and we may even hear in our hearts the sweet and consoling words which the Saviour addressed to Mary Magdalene: *Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much.*

Before concluding this instruction let me direct attention to the high value the Catholic Church has always attached to perfect contrition—a value thus expressed by one of the greatest doctors of the Church, St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "Neither the multitude of our sins, nor the shortness of time, nor the close approach of our last hour, nor the enormity of our lives, are any obstacle to pardon of our sins, provided only our contrition is sincere and perfect."

And hence it is that the Catholic Church has always refused to pass judgment on the damnation of anyone, not even on the greatest sinner. The Church's attitude is illustrated by the following incident: Many years ago there died at Rome a priest whom all looked upon as a great saint, and ere long his canonization was demanded by the people. But the Church refused the request, and this was the reason of the refusal: Forty years previously he had assisted at the execution of a criminal. For days previously he had tried his best to soften the criminal's heart, but the condemned man declined to listen to his exhortations. The priest accompanied the unhappy man to the very scaffold, but with no better result; at last, turning to the people who had come to witness the execution, he cried out in despair: "Oh people, ye come to see a reprobate die." And die he did, without having shown the smallest sign of repentance. Well, in the course of the forty years that elapsed from that day, the priest had gone to his reward; the fame of his sanctity was spread; and God was said to have testified to that sanctity by many miracles. Yet, the canonization was not carried out. And why? That one word of his was remembered: "Behold the death of a reprobate." The words were not the words of a saint. He had wounded the faith; he had set limits to the mercy of God; he had laid down what none had a right to do, not even the Pope—he had implied he knew what none can know—that is, the change that may take place in the heart of man in the twinkling of an eye.

Twenty-second Instruction on the Sacraments

CONTRITION MUST BE UNIVERSAL AND SUPREME

We have already seen that sorrow for sin must be interior and supernatural; it now remains to examine the two other qualities indicated in the course of previous instructions wherein it was pointed out that sorrow must also be universal and supreme. To both these qualities we shall devote the present instruction.

When we say that sorrow must be universal, we mean that it must extend to all mortal sins without exception. As for venial sins, though it is highly desirable and becoming to be sorry for them also, or at least for those of them that are more deliberate and grave, inasmuch as they are always an offence against God; yet rigorously speaking this is not absolutely necessary, since venial sins do not deprive us of sanctifying grace and they can be effaced by means other than that of the sacrament.

But regarding mortal sins which are characterised in Holy Writ by the title of *iniquities*, there is no distinction or exception. The Holy Ghost has left us no room for doubt: *Cast away from you all your transgressions . . . do penance for all your iniquities*;[1] and common sense teaches the same—each mortal sin is altogether incompatible with the love and grace of God, and consequently God cannot remit one without granting the other, nor can we truly detest the one without receiving the other.

If we were to except even a single mortal sin, the sorrow we imagine we have for the others would be false and illusory, and could not be truly called supernatural. And here is the reason: Just as if you were to believe all the articles of faith with the exception of one alone, your faith would not be real faith, since the supernatural motive of faith—that is, revelation—embraces all the articles and admits of no exception; so if you were to detest all your sins except one, your contrition would not be true contrition, since its supernatural motive—that is, the injury done to God—embraces all mortal sins, and admits of no exception. All, then, must be detested.

But, you may ask, where will you find anyone who, repenting of his sins, does not detest them all? Such a thing does not seem probable. Yet in practice many exceptions and reservations are made, if not with the lips, at least with the heart. And when? When the penitent finds himself attached to a sin by some particular ties—a sin which is specially near to his heart and which may with all truth be called his favourite sin. In this case he easily detests all the other sins which interest him less and from which he looks for little advantage or pleasure; but he secretly cherishes traces of affection and love for the sin that has greater influence over him, and it is this sin he would wish to spare.

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[1] Ezech. xviii. 31.

For one, this sin will be sordid avarice, which if it narrowly escapes making him unjust, fraudulent, and grasping, renders him at least cold-hearted and uncharitable to the poor, harsh and over-bearing towards his servants, the source of unending complaints and murmurs in consequence of the excessive parsimony with which he provides for the wants of his house, and of his reluctance to provide even the most necessary and indispensable expenses.

For another, that sin will be secret jealousy conceived and entertained in his heart against some one—a jealousy which, if it does not cause him to break forth into open acts of hostility and vengeance, nevertheless excites in him grave feelings of hatred and malevolence as often as he sees his enemy or hears the mention of his name—feelings which are incompatible with Christian charity and which seriously offend against it.

For another, his pet sin will be some sensual affection or some other attachment to a person of a different sex—an attachment which though free, perhaps, from unbecoming or immodest actions, is, nevertheless, a continual source of sinful thoughts and desires.

These sins and others arising from special attachments are precisely the sins which are concealed in examination of conscience, and which people pretend not to see, for fear of discovering a wound they would not have healed; and these are also the sins which are left out of account in exciting contrition, being considered as trifling in comparison with others which in reality are of less importance, and the reason is because the heart is more deeply attached to them and does not want to give them up.

This is not right; if our repentance must be universal we cannot exclude such sins. Nay, it is even with them we must commence, because they are the greatest plague of our conscience, and the ordinary source of all our other sins. It is precisely the sins to which we are specially attached that we should have particularly in mind when exciting our contrition—if we are avaricious we should take special care to excite sorrow for unlawful, or at least uncertain and very doubtful gains; if ambitious, the waste and expenditure made to the prejudice of creditors who are never paid; if sensual, the unholy thoughts and desires that fill the mind; if vengeful, our passions, and contentions, and bitter hatreds; if drunkards, the drunkenness, and the baneful drink-shops that are frequented. I know well that it will not be easy to resolve on the sacrifice of our dearest inclinations and likings; but there is no alternative—to preserve an affection for a single mortal sin is the same thing as to preserve all one's sins in one's soul, and thus draw down the malediction merited by King Saul when on being ordered by God to slay all the Amalecites, he spared the person of their then king. Now this king is a clear figure of one's favourite sin, one's predominant passion. *Cast away from you*, then, to use the words of the Holy Ghost, *all your transgressions and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit*[1]—if, that is, your real object in confession is to be truly reconciled to God, and not merely that of lulling your conscience to rest and stifling remorse by means of a hypocritical confession. It will not be necessary to say more on this subject—what has been said is quite sufficient. I consequently pass on to explain the last quality of contrition.

Sorrow must in the last place be *supreme*, that is to say, such as to make us hate and detest sin above every other evil, and if it does not reach this degree it is not the sorrow requisite for the sacrament. The reason is that contrition must have a certain proportion to the greatness of the evil which is sin. Now as sin is the greatest and most supreme of all evils—nay, it is even an infinite evil, because it is opposed to a God who is infinitely good, and because it involves the loss of Him, and along with that loss, eternal damnation which is the greatest of all misfortunes—so it should be hated with an infinite hatred if that were possible; but while that is beyond our power, our sorrow for sin should at least surpass every other sorrow. We should be wanting in proper esteem for God and our own soul, if we showed that there is in the world something that displeases us more than sin, or at least as much.

We must, then, feel greater sorrow for the offence done to God and for the loss of His grace and friendship, than we should for the loss of our goods, for the most outrageous insult, or for the loss of our dearest friend, nay, of our very life. And though it is not necessary to draw these comparisons in particular, to think on our other misfortunes, or say as each one of them occurs to our mind that the offence done to God troubles and afflicts us more than such or such a misfortune—in fact to do so might in a certain sense be attended with danger—yet for the validity of contrition it is necessary that sin is, more odious, more bitter, more hateful than every other evil.

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[1] Ezech. xviii. 31

"If this is true," someone may say, "I have good reason to distrust my sorrow, because I do not think I experience that grief for my sins which I have felt and do feel in my temporal misfortunes. These affect me much more sensibly than the offence against God. How, then, can I persuade myself that my sorrow for sin is supreme and more intense than every other sorrow?"

I thoroughly comprehend the difficulty. But for your instruction as well as for your consolation I should add that when we say a sorrow superior to every other sorrow is required, we do not mean that it should be so in tenderness and sensibility, but in preference and esteem—in the same sense in which we say that our love of God should be superior to every other love. To fulfil the precept of loving God above all things it is not required to have that sensible affection for Him which we feel towards persons who are very dear to us. It suffices that the love of God renders us practically disposed always to prefer Him and His friendship to every person, pleasure, or interest. Such love as this is called *appreciative,* that is to say, a love of esteem—a solid, judicious, reasonable love, by force of which we come, in practice, to place God above every other thing. If we have this good disposition, we truly love God above all things, even though we do not, perhaps, feel towards Him that sensible attraction which we experience towards material objects.

The same remarks apply proportionately to sorrow for having offended God. For that sorrow to be supreme it is not necessary for it to be the most sensible of all our sorrows. It is enough that it puts us in the precise disposition of wishing we had never offended Him, and of being firmly resolved, no matter what the cost, never to offend Him again. This preference is sufficiently expressed in the well-known form which, when coming from the heart, and not merely from the lips, is excellent: "I wish I were dead rather than offend Thee"—thus preferring the greatest of all temporal losses, which is life, to the loss of the grace of God or to sin. In this way contrition can be fundamentally and substantially superior to every other sorrow, even though it is not such in keenness and sensibility. A familiar example will make this clear.

Take the case of a mother who has two children, one small and still an infant, the other already grown up and strong. You notice how she will devote all her pain, and attention, and care to the first, and seems almost to forget the existence of the second. Yet would you on that account say that she loves the first more than the second? Certainly not—let us imagine that she finds herself reduced to the dire necessity of losing either one or the other of them, and she will prefer to lose the first rather than the second ; for though she displays greater tenderness and feeling towards the first, she nevertheless prizes the second much more, because he is already grown up and is the staff and support of the house. And though she would seem to lose her life were she to lose her dear infant, yet she would make this hard but reasonable sacrifice to preserve the eldest-born of the family. Such, then, is the way in which there can be found to exist in sorrow a sincere degree of preference, without that degree being more sensible or more keenly felt.

Do not, then, be cast down, if you do not experience those tender feelings of affection which have their being in the inferior part of man's nature ; the only consideration to be attended to is to see that your heart testifies that you hate sin as the greatest of all evils and that you are ready to suffer every other evil rather than sin again.

While all this is true—while we know that sensible sorrow for sin is not necesssary—while we recognize that sighs and tears are not demanded of us, we must also admit that sighs and tears would also come if we were thoroughly impressed with the greatness of the evil of sin—if we saw our sins as David, and Peter and Magdalen saw theirs. If, then, the absence of sensible sorrow should not of itself trouble us or make us distrust the sincerity and superiority of our contrition, it will nevertheless be always a solid reason for humiliation and regret before God to find ourselves so little moved and affected by the offence done Him, while for even trivial temporal afflictions and losses we often show the keenest pain and displeasure.

Such, then, are the four qualities of contrition. The sorrow that falls short in any one of these is a substantially defective sorrow, either in essence, or motive, or interest, or degree. Some spiritual writers add a fifth quality—that sorrow should be accompanied by hope of pardon. But it would be more true to say that hope is pre-supposed, just as faith is pre-supposed, in whoever approaches the tribunal of Penance ; yet as the Council of Trent makes special mention of it when, speaking of sorrow, it says expressly that it should be accompanied by hope of pardon, I shall devote a few words to this point before concluding this instruction.

Let us, then, suppose the case of a person who is truly sorry for all his sins in the manner we have already explained, but who, terrified at the sight of them, despairs of obtaining pardon ; would his sorrow avail in the sight of God ? Certainly not—it would even be a new sin, because if on the one hand he honours the majesty and justice of God by his repentance, on the other hand he offends His goodness and mercy by despairing of pardon. Of such a kind was the sorrow of Cain who looked on his brother's murder as a crime too great to admit of forgiveness. *My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon*[1]; of such a kind was the sorrow of Judas, who betrayed his Divine Master and whose sorrow wanted nothing but the hope of pardon to make it holy and salutary. He clearly and publicly confessed his horrible crime: *I have sinned*; he openly proclaimed the innocence of Jesus Christ: *I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;* not alone this but, stricken with grief, he returned the money he had received for his treason: *He brought back the thirty pieces of silver*[2]; and finding no one willing to receive it, he threw it at the feet of the council. What more could one desire to believe him to be sincerely repentant? Nothing; but he despaired of pardon, and his despair was a still more cruel offence to the merciful heart of his Master than his treason itself, and led to his utter ruin. Oh! if sinners only knew how boundless is the love of God towards them, many that now lie fearful, distracted, dejected in the sepulchre of their sins would not hesitate to run confidently and throw themselves into His arms.

Whatever, then, may be our condition, whatever may be the number and enormity of our sins, let us never allow any such feeling of despair to enter our hearts. If we detest our sins sincerely we have a well-grounded motive to hope for pardon, since pardon has been expressly promised by God to the repentant sinner. There is no sin really unpardonable except that which is not retracted by sincere sorrow. Let not him who has not such sorrow boast of the mercy of God. That God in His mercy is ready to receive the sinner provided only the sinner returns to Him with a contrite and humble heart is an article of faith. *If the wicked do penance for all his sins . . . he shall live and shall not die.*[3] Is not this clear: *If the wicked does penance*—this is the absolute, indispensable condition that must be verified in us if we truly desire to cast ourselves on the mercy of God; otherwise vain and idle is our hope.

Yet as sinners, while not so ignorant as to imagine there exists in God a sort of blind, stupid, foolish goodness altogether unworthy of Him, are sometimes tempted to despair owing to the difficulty they apprehend in being truly converted to the Lord, even though they are firmly persuaded that they will be kindly received by Him provided their conversion is sincere; to remove this difficulty I shall, in our next instruction, suggest certain means to be employed in obtaining true repentance for our faults. Meanwhile let me repeat: Hope, and sorrow; sorrow and hope. Sorrow without hope would make you despair; while hope without sorrow would render you guilty of presumption. Let us hold ourselves equally aloof from both one and the other extreme, and we shall find grace and salvation.

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[1] Gen. iv. 13. [2] Matt. xxvii. 3. [3] Ezech. xviii. 21.

Twenty-third Instruction on the Sacraments

HOW TO EXCITE CONTRITION

If to be truly penitent it sufficed to know what contrition is and what the qualities that should accompany it, contrition would be easy indeed; but between knowing it and having it there is a very great difference—to be sincerely contrite is not so easy as is imagined by some who think they really have it and can evoke it at a moment's notice.

It would, then, be of little use to have given long instructions on the nature and qualities of contrition, if I did not also point out the means to be employed in exciting it.

As a foundation of all this instruction it will be necessary to establish clearly a truth with regard to which we show ourselves far from convinced in practice, and it is that contrition must come from God and hence is called supernatural in this sense also. While it is an incontestable article of faith that no sinner can re-enter into God's grace without true conversion and sincere repentance, it is also an article of faith that without the help of the grace of God there can be neither true conversion nor sincere repentance. On this point we have the unmistakable definition of the Council of Trent, which pronounces anathema against those who should dare to assert that "without the directing inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and without His help, man can believe, hope, or be penitent to the extent required in order that grace of justification be bestowed upon him." Thus, then, contrition is a special and extraordinary gift—a gift, moreover, which is purely gratuitous.

It is a *gift of God*; consequently it is not in our unaided power to procure it. Of ourselves we can, indeed, fall—but of ourselves we are powerless to rise; we can kill our own souls by sin—but just as a corpse cannot of itself return to life, so a soul dead to grace cannot of itself return to spiritual life, but stands in need of one of those supernatural moving graces to penetrate it and revive it from its mortal lethargy.

It is not a common or ordinary gift, but a *special and extraordinary gift*—a gift as great as the grace of pardon and sanctification. Who can ever thoroughly comprehend the intrinsic value and worth of this grace which transfers us from a state of sin and of enmity with God and of eternal damnation, to a state of holinesss and friendship with Him, which is equivalent to saying it transfers us from the greatest of all misfortunes to the greatest of all blessings? Now the grace of contrition which serves as a proximate disposition towards this great gift is certainly not less precious than the gift itself.

But most important of all is the consideration that this special and privileged gift is *purely gratuitous*—a gift which God our Lord grants us out of His own pure liberality and which He can freely refuse to each one, and refuse, moreover, without being guilty of the least injustice; for sin, by constituting us in a state of enmity with God, excludes us thereby from all claim on His graces.

If we only thoroughly understood this truth what would not be our terror at finding ourselves in a state of sin, when we reflect that in this state of perdition we could do nothing of ourselves, and that we should ever have to remain in that state, if God did not bestow His compassionate look on us and on our miseries. I say *compassionate*, for as long as we are in the state of sin He cannot regard us with an eye of tenderness and love.

If we thoroughly comprehended these truths who would ever have the daring and boldness to sin? For to sin is nothing else than voluntarily to put oneself in a state of perdition which in itself is irreparable and eternal, and from which we have no strength of our own to extricate ourselves, nor even the right to demand that strength from God.

And who would be so bold as to sin through hope of being able to obtain pardon of his sin in confession, as is done by only too many who say: "I will commit this sin, and then I will just go and confess it"? Such persons as these either do not know at all what confession means, or their knowledge is very far from being what it ought. If they imagine that to go to confession simply means to pour their sins into the ear of the priest, they commit a gross error; but if they truly believe that confession means a sincere conversion of the heart to God, their language is as nonsensical as it is presumptuous. It is nonsensical; for what do the words: "I will commit this sin and then I will confess it" mean unless "I will commit this sin, and afterwards I will repent of it and be sorry for having committed it." Is not this the merest folly? If I desire to dissuade a person from an evil undertaking it suffices for me to persuade him that he shall be sorry for it later on; while precisely on account of future repentance the persons in question encourage themselves to sin, and instead of saying: "I will never commit this sin because I know I must repent of it one day," draw quite the opposite conclusion.

But, they may imagine, it is at least in their power to repent at their leisure and pleasure. Now what is this but diabolical presumption ?—to rely, when sinning, on a grace which is altogether in the hands of God and of which they become positively unworthy by sin ! How do they know they will have the grace to repent ? Instead, then, of saying : " I will commit this sin, and I will afterwards go to confession," they should resist the temptation and say : " Who knows whether I shall have time to confess, whether I shall make a good confession, whether God will give me a penitent heart ? " Here we have a sounder and wiser reasoning which may readily prove useful as a restraint against sin.

Turning now to the principal object of this instruction : if the grace of contrition is a gift of God, what must I do to obtain it ? Three things are demanded—cessation from sin, fervent prayer, and attentive meditation on the motives of contrition.

1. First of all it is necessary to give up sin because sin is the greatest of all obstacles to the grace of repentance.

It is an astonishing fact, but it is a fact, that there are some who, in the very time in which they think about going to confession, and even after they have fixed the day for carrying their resolution into effect, nevertheless continue to lead the self-same course of life, and do not cease to commit their accustomed sins up to the very day they had decided on. Now, how is it possible for God to touch their hearts if they on their part continue to heap sin on sin and thus continue to provoke the Lord's anger still more and more ? It is no wonder their contrition is defective—we cannot but regard with grave suspicion the dispositions of persons who continue to sin up to the very moment of confession and who thus present themselves before the sacred tribunal with their sins still warm and, so to say, smoking in their souls. Is it likely that a change takes place in them thus suddenly that almost at the self-same time they can be sinners and penitents, can hate what only a moment before was the object of their affection, and can pass from one extreme to the other without any interval ? That may indeed happen by a miracle of grace, but under ordinary circumstances it never takes place.

As a general rule the sinner must prepare the way and dispose his soul for the grace of contrition : *Prepare ye the way of the Lord ; make straight His paths.* Now the first disposition—and it is a negative one—is previously to renounce sin. A peace is never concluded between two warring powers, without being preceded by a truce, an armistice, a suspension of hostilities. The same must be said of the case of the soul that is at enmity with God and that wishes to be restored to peace with Him.

2. The second means to be employed is prayer. Prayer, as you know, is that certain, universal means to which are attached all the graces and mercies of the Lord: *Ask and you shall receive*; and with much greater reason still, the special and all precious grace of true repentance; *Convert me, O Lord, and I shall be converted to Thee.* In preparing for confession, then, we must, from the very beginning, enter into ourselves so as to recognise the misery of our unhappy condition and our own absolute powerlessness to extricate ourselves therefrom by our own unaided resources; and hence we must turn to the Lord and earnestly beseech Him to pour into our intellect and will the abundance of lights and graces we stand in need of, to know sin as it really is and as it appears in His eyes, and to detest it as heartily as possible; and we should also strengthen the force of our own prayers by having recourse to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, our angel guardian, and our patron saints. This is precisely the way to begin, but it is also the point that is often not attended to.

It not unfrequently happens that those who come to the church to go to confession, having made the sign of the cross, and recited the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, at once begin to examine their conscience. Now, is it to be expected that God will enlighten the soul to see all its sins, and move the heart to detest them, if we do not think it worth our while to ask Him? People sometimes act thus perhaps because they have been taught there are five conditions requisite for confession, and that the first of these is examination of conscience. But it should be borne in mind that if prayer is not mentioned among these five conditions it is because it is always presupposed of its very nature. Who is not aware that prayer is always necessary towards every good and salutary act, even towards the least important? How much more is it necessary to obtain from God the special and privileged grace of true conversion? This assuredly is no ordinary grace—a grace no less precious than many of the graces for which we have recourse to God. Suppose it were a question of being cured of some illness, what prayers and devotions should we not make to God! And yet people sometimes seem to imagine they can be healed of the maladies of the soul—the worst of all maladies—without recommending themselves with all their hearts to God.

Prayer, then, I repeat once more, prayer is necessary; and prayer all the more intense and fervent according as our needs are greater and more pressing. Those especially who experience a certain disinclination and a certain repugnance to conversion and who feel that their heart is hard, perverted, and obstinate, should pray with greater fervour and with greater insistence that the Lord may penetrate their heart and touch and soften its hardness. The fervour of prayer is always in proportion to the desire we have to obtain our object, and that desire is always in proportion to the need we feel. If by fervent prayer we were able to free ourselves from our bodily infirmities we may well say there would no longer be as much as one invalid in the world, because we really feel the weight of these infirmities and have consequently a keen desire to be delivered from them. Let us do as much for the soul ; let us recognize our misery and the extreme danger in which we live ; and we shall pour forth our prayers with such fervour that God will not fail to hear us.

3. But prayer alone is not enough. As God demands our co-operation in all things, so to prayer we must in the third place add the attentive consideration of the motives that are capable of exciting within us sorrow for our sins.

We should, then, conceive a profound and supreme hatred of sin—a hatred that brings with it a firm and determined resolution to fly sin and never commit it again. Now a hatred such as this cannot be conceived by our will, if our intellect has not been persuaded and convinced of the greatness of the evil of sin. Now this keen conviction is not the work of a moment, or of a fleeting and superficial glance—to obtain it, time and recollection and serious reflection are necessary.

Even in this most essential point, defects are not unfrequently noticeable. After having examined their conscience, people sometimes turn at once to recite an act of contrition, mentally or orally, and in their endeavour to make it heartfelt would almost seem as if they wished to force their hearts to repent ; but this is simply trying to produce an effect without using the cause that should produce it. How can the will be forced to detest sin, if we do not seriously and particularly meditate beforehand on the malice and the evil effects of sin ? It is easy to say : " I repent of having by my sins offended so good a God, lost Paradise, and merited eternal damnation " ; but are we thoroughly alive as to who this God is whom we have offended, to the greatness of the injury we have done Him, the extent of the blessings we have forfeited, and the bitterness of the pains we have merited ? And not only should we be alive to these truths in a general way—we should ponder on them and penetrate our hearts with them.

In a word, it is one thing to have a general notion of the motives of contrition, and quite another thing to apprehend and feel their force so keenly as to enable them to influence our will. Consider the child whom death has just robbed of his father—he continues to laugh and play and amuse himself just as if nothing had happened him, whilst his older brothers are plunged in tears and utterly inconsolable. Whence comes the difference ? Does not this child know that he also has lost his father ? He knows it and he sees it like the rest, but through want of reflection and judgment he is unable to apprehend, like the others, the extent of his misfortune and the greatness of the loss that has overtaken him in the death of his father.

The same thing happens in the case of many penitents—they are well instructed by faith as to the motives to detest sin ; but simply because they do not strive to enter into them carefully and heartily, they are, like the child mentioned a moment ago, insensible to their own unhappy state, to the loss of God, and to the tremendous misfortunes that oppress the soul. Far different are such as these from those other penitents who, animated by a lively faith, are consumed with sorrow in the sight of God. Thus, then, we find exemplified the difference between merely knowing a thing, and being thoroughly penetrated with it, and we see how important it is to be thoroughly alive to the motives of contrition.

Let us, then, dwell on these motives over and over again until we feel ourselves deeply moved, and until with reiterated strokes we succeed in drawing forth from our hearts a fountain of true contrition, and let us always bear in mind that if we do not strive to make these or similar reflections, and merely content ourselves with saying : " My God I repent of ever having offended Thee, and I wish I were dead rather than I had done so," it will be difficult to say it sincerely and truthfully.

" Must I then," you may ask, " spend much time in conceiving this sorrow ? " I answer : As much time is required as is necessary to afford you ground for believing that contrition really exists in your heart and penetrates your will. No general rule can be laid down on the point which depends altogether on the state of each individual conscience. For some, and especially for those pious souls who lead a life of faith and of habitual hatred of sin, little time indeed is needed —a simple reflection, a single uplifting of the heart to God is often all that is required ; but for others, and especially for habitual sinners who have a less accurate idea of the greatness of sin, longer time is required—a time more or less in proportion to their obstinacy and their sin. The safest rule is for each one to strive to do his best, and God will do the rest.

Twenty-fourth Instruction on the Sacraments

RESOLUTION OF SINNING NO MORE

Contrition, which, as we have seen, is the first act of the penitent, comprises two parts, one of which concerns the past and the other the future. With regard to the past, that is to say, to the sins committed, it demands true sorrow and sincere detestation; with regard to the future, it is a firm resolution of never again committing either the sins into which we have already fallen, or any other sin into which we can fall: "Contrition is a heartfelt sorrow and detestation of sin with a firm resolution of sinning no more." As we have already seen all that is requisite for the first part of contrition, it now remains to glance at the second part.

First of all it should be observed that all I have said as to the absolute necessity of sorrow for the past is equally to be understood of a firm resolution regarding the future. In the first place the resolution in question cannot be separated from contrition if that contrition is sincere. It is not possible to repent sincerely of a fault while at the same time preserving the will to repeat it—the two ideas are simply incompatible.

But even apart from this consideration, the very nature of the pardon we ask for the offence committed demands on the part of him who asks it a serious intention never to commit that offence again. Where is the man who having offended another and wishing to be reconciled with him, does not, when expressing regret for the offence, also assure him of his firm and unalterable resolution never to repeat the offence? And on the other hand, who would dream of pardoning his offender if he was well aware that he was not resolved to cease offending him? It is evident, therefore, that if we desire to be restored to the grace of God we must, along with sorrow for having offended Him, necessarily have also the firm purpose never to displease Him any more; otherwise it would be mere mockery of God. Let us, then, see what is this firm purpose and what are the qualities requisite for its validity.

The purpose of sinning no more is, according to St. Thomas, an act of a strong and deliberate will. It is an act of the will; hence not a mere form of words, after the manner of compliments which are used for politeness' sake in ordinary intercourse, and which pledge or bind to nothing.

Nor is it a mere project—a vague idea of amending—such as is held by all who still preserve any trace of religion and faith. Thus there are some who are convinced that sin is a great evil and who say: "It must not be done, I should not do it, I ought not do it," and who in spite of that have the will to do it. Now to say "I should not do it," is an act of the intellect; while "I will not do it" is an act of the will which is precisely what is requisite to obtain pardon of sin.

Nor does it consist in any and every kind of weak, feeble, imperfect will that wavers between wishing and not wishing. This is nothing more than a mere velleity—a feeble will—which leads only to idle speculations, to barren and fruitless desires, and which is on this account compared by St. Augustine to the efforts of a man who would wish to rise early in the morning, but who, conquered by an extreme desire to sleep on, gives way to his desire and returns to sleep once more. Half-formed resolutions of this kind show that our heart is still divided between God and sin, that we are interiorly irresolute, that we are unable to decide on abandoning sin—at the very most we can only say that we should like to abandon it, but that we are not really ready to do so. Now the firm purpose of sinning no more demands a complete and conquering will which annihilates and destroys every wish to the contrary; a sincere and definite will, determined to give up sin—give it up at all cost, and give it up without reserve and for ever, marking out at the same time and making use of the opportunities and measures necessary to succeed.

In what has been said we find sufficiently indicated the qualities that should accompany our resolution of sinning no more. A purpose of this nature must necessarily be interior, strong, universal, and efficacious. Let us explain these four qualities.

1. In the first place it must be *interior*, that is, must spring from a heart truly and sincerely resolved to perform all that is promised with the lips. If the heart is not in accord with the tongue our sorrow and our resolution are merely fictitious and hypocritical. Now if we were to penetrate into the interior of our hearts and see what our sentiments really are, we should perhaps find that we take but little care indeed to back up the good intentions we profess to have. We promise many things; but our heart tells us that everything will continue just the same in the future as it has been in the past. And if we want a decisive proof of this, here it is:—

Whence comes it that we each day form with easy indifference resolutions which should cost great and serious efforts? Is it a mere trifle to resolve never to offend God any more, renounce all that is dearest and most agreeable to the passions, cut short, for example, some sinful companionship, reject some obstinate and tenderly cherished aversion, formally retract and unsay lies and calumnies, abandon some lucrative though unlawful business, and give up the gains unjustly acquired? Now resolutions of such importance as these ought not to be taken without serious reflection, and assuredly would they seem to imply no little hesitation and difficulty. Yet they are made without the slightest apprehension or deliberation; and why? Because the heart takes no interest in them, because they lead to no practical result, because they bind and oblige us to nothing. This is the real reason on account of which many and repeated resolutions lead in practice to no serious emendation.

If we do not, then, desire to mock God who is never deceived, as men are, by false pretences and promises, we shall, when about to form resolutions of the kind, examine our heart, and examine it thoroughly, to see whether our dispositions and resolutions to renounce sin are such as are demanded of us.

2. This resolution, moreover, admits of no limitation or reserve; and this brings me to the second quality referred to which is that our purpose of sinning no more should be *firm.* A building is said to be firm when its foundations are strong enough to resist every shock and exclude all danger of tottering or falling. A good resolution, then, will be firm when it makes us disposed and determined to fly sin in spite of all difficulties and at all costs, at the risk even of losing all that we possess, or of having to suffer every evil.

The reason of this is that there is no condition or circumstance in which it is lawful to sin; the resolution to avoid sin must extend to all possible circumstances, and be invested with the sentiments that animated St. Paul after his conversion when he questioned himself and said: *Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?* [1] No, nothing of all this: *I am sure that no creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.* Are we to imagine that his words are the transport of sublime charity limited to the saints alone, and merely a matter of counsel and perfection? We should err were we to think so—this is a disposition which should be found in every Christian, a disposition absolutely inseparable from that firmness of purpose which God demands in us as far as possible—a firmness of such a sort as to clothe our nature and character with a kind of punctilious obstinacy to which we sometimes, and that not always wisely, deliver ourselves, and from which nothing is capable of detaching us—when we have fixed our heart on a certain thing, be that good or bad, we are unwilling to renounce it at any price.

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[1] Rom. viii. 35.

From this we may conclude that it is impossible to conciliate with a purpose of this nature certain reservations or conditions which we attach either implicitly or explicitly to the promises we make to God to sin no more. Some people, for instance, promise to avoid sin "provided they are not placed in the same need or the same necessity; or provided they receive no further injury or annoyance from such and such a person; or provided they are not tempted or led into such and such a sin," and so on.

Sometimes these conditions are expressed and escape the lips of the penitent during his confession; at other times they are concealed in the bottom of the heart so that the penitent himself is not even aware of them. Yet they nullify the good purpose of amendment, because it is thereby wanting in requisite firmness which knows neither limit nor reserve. Be we rich or be we poor; be we persecuted or be we not; be we annoyed by others or be we left at peace—in these and in all other imaginable circumstances we must absolutely exclude the intention to sin.

Now what are we to say of those who, tied down by evil habits persuade themselves that it is impossible for them not to fall back into sin? I reply that this false persuasion completely upsets the purpose of amendment. And, in fact, how can we sincerely and firmly make a promise to God which we consider impossible? Let such persons, then, commence by correcting their erroneous persuasion, let them bring home clearly to their minds that what is impossible to our natural powers is not only possible but even easy to the grace of the Lord on the hope of which we must base our good resolutions, and not on our own natural powers with which we are able to do nothing.

It is different, however, with those who, when forming their resolution to sin no more cannot shake off a certain doubt, a certain fear, I would almost say a certain presentiment, that they will not be faithful to it. Such a feeling does not of itself in any way prejudice the firmness of the resolution. Thus, for example, in reflecting on their frailty, on the frequency of their falls in spite of numerous promises and resolutions made over and over again, on the strength of their evil habits, on the dangers that actually surround them or that may arise, they distrust themselves, fear their purpose is not constant, dread they will fall again, and say in their hearts: "It will be the same now as it has been heretofore." But all this, I repeat, does not interfere with the fact that their actual disposition to avoid sin is sincere and strong—the present is one thing, the future is another. We can decide and form a judgment on our present disposition; but as to the future we are in the dark. The confessor himself must rely on our present disposition alone; and even were an angel from heaven to reveal to him that we should ere long fall into sin again, nevertheless he can and must absolve us, provided he finds us actually disposed. Moreover, does not God Himself to-day remit the sins of many who are truly contrite and ask for pardon, although He well knows that they will fall again?

It is one thing then to be certain that we will never sin again, and quite another thing actually to have the firm purpose of never sinning any more. The first is an act of the intellect and concerns the future; the second is an act of the will, and concerns the present. Let us take a striking example. During the course of winter you find you have to go on ice; you are afraid you will fall; you even say, "I shall fall." Now, I ask, have you the will to fall? Certainly not; nay, the very danger of falling, combined with the will not to fall, makes you carefully pick your steps and move with the greatest precaution. You see, then, that it is one thing to fear, and to be apprehensive, and quite another thing to be willing. So it is in the case in question—as long as we are actually determined on not falling, on doing our best, on flying the danger, and on recommeding ourselves with all our heart to God, relying all the time on His holy grace which if properly sought and well corresponded to will never fail us. The fear to the contrary that agitates and disturbs us, the thought that we shall fail once more in keeping our promise to God, can do no injury to our good resolution. But let us now pass on to the third quality.

3. The resolution of sinning no more must in the third place be *universal*, nay *doubly universal*—both as to sins and as to times.

First of all it must extend to all sins which have been committed in the past or which can be committed in the future, even though they will never actually be committed. This, however, refers to mortal sins alone; for as far as venial sins are concerned, since they do not exclude sanctifying grace, and on the other hand cannot all be avoided without a special privilege of divine grace, it will fully suffice that our resolution includes the intention of avoiding the gravest and most deliberate. But in the case of mortal sins, the resolution to avoid them must extend to all without exception—paying special attention to those which are graver and more habitual, which have hitherto contributed most to hinder our lives from being all they should be, and which make the deepest wounds on our souls.

Bear well in mind an important point. I should not like to see you rest content with certain vague general, indefinite resolutions of never offending God any more. If you do not wish merely to beat the air, come to particulars, review your life in practice, and determine in detail such or such a sin to which you are most inclined, or most attached, and which is the source of greater danger to your soul. On this you should dwell, on this you must insist, and you must strengthen your resolution and particularize your purpose of amendment, by promising to God to be vigilant and careful in avoiding this particular sin as well all grave sins in general for the future.

If this much is carefully done, there will be no occasion for deploring that common and familiar monstrosity which so dishonours piety and affords room for scandal—I mean the frequentation of the sacraments on the one hand, accompanied by grave defects never seriously amended on the other—sacraments side by side with sordid and shameful avarice; sacraments side by side with impure passions and sensual, guilty practices; sacraments side by side with inveterate hatred, calumny and detraction; sacraments side by side with drunkenness; sacraments side by side with open violation of the plainest duties. All this arises from no other source than from that of beating the air with vague resolutions of sinning no more, without at the same time taking care to apply those resolutions specially to that evil or sin which touches you most closely, and from which very often the eye is turned purposely away simply because the remedy is not really desired.

Not only must the purpose of sinning no more embrace all sins in the manner indicated, but it must also extend to all times—to our whole life. It would almost seem as if many have no other idea of the sacrament than that of a mere simple temporary suspension of sin, and not, as it ought to be, an absolute, eternal divorce. They consequently restrict their resolution to certain definite times and no longer; for example, as long as some special solemnity lasts, such as Easter time, the time of a mission or jubilee; as long as a certain danger, or illness, or undertaking lasts; or until such time as they shall have received absolution from the priest which they well know he will not grant if he does not first see that the requisite conditions are complied with; but all the time they secretly resolve in their hearts, in an almost unconscious manner, to resume their former life as soon as they conveniently can. How deep is the abyss of the human heart, and how is it filled with craftiness and malice, and a thousand tortuous ways!

Be well persuaded, then, that resolutions thus restricted and limited are of no avail. The will must be resolute and determined to abstain from sin, not merely sometimes or for some time but permanently and for ever ; for sin is always and essentially a great evil, nay evil itself, while that God whom we are bound to serve is God of all times, and in every place demands our worship, obedience and fidelity.

Consider, then, and see whether your resolution to avoid sin is such as to exclude all idea of returning to sin any more. Is it not monstrous to see many at the commencement of Lent accuse themselves of sins committed during the holidays before Lent, while at the same time they are ready to repeat the same sins whenever the same occasion arises ? In the same way others, as Easter draws near, come to accuse themselves of having violated the law of fast and abstinence, while at the same time having the disposition to do precisely the same the following year. How can we regard this as anything like a complete and absolute renunciation of sin such as is required of us by God towards the validity of our resolution, and towards the grace of the sacrament ? Do we hope to deceive God, or do we not rather deceive ourselves ?

4. Finally the resolution must be *efficacious*, that is to say it must render us ready and disposed to use the means necessary to avoid sin. The reason is clear—he who sincerely wishes to obtain a certain end, wishes also the means that lead to that end, and without which the end cannot be obtained. And just as the wish to be healed would be false and illusory in an invalid who refuses to take the proper remedies ; so in like manner the will to fly sin must be regarded as false and illusory when it is not accompanied by the serious resolution of making use of the remedies that are necessary, whether they be positive or negative, whether general or particular.

How, then, are we to understand the stubbornness that is noticed in many penitents on hearing the suggestions that are given them by the confessor for the purpose of consolidating their resolutions and rendering them constant and persevering ? If, the confessor points out, you desire to remain in the grace of God, if you wish to avoid falling into your accustomed sins, you must shun that place, or that person, or those amusements ; you must follow a system, a rule of life marked out according to such and such pious practices ; and yet on the contrary, you come to allege excuses, difficulties, obstacles, to exempt yourself from the means I have laid down for you. Is not this a clear sign of a changeable, inefficacious will, and of a resolution that is merely apparent ? Do you not say to the Lord that you would rather die than offend Him ; yet here there is no question of dying, but of something far less. Still I understand perfectly—you say it as a matter of course and custom, and not, as you should, out of a deliberate and efficacious will.

I believe that I have now sufficiently explained what is the meaning and what the nature of the purpose of sinning no more. I shall here add only a single reflection to confirm all I have said. In the course of our lives we make many resolutions that concern the things of here below ; but of all the resolutions we do make, those we make to God in our confessions are precisely those we remember least, while these are the very ones that should be remembered best and most faithfully executed, simply because they are made to God. Whence does this arise ? Because when preparing for confession we make, properly speaking, no resolution. There are, indeed, words and protestations of the lips, but no true will determined to maintain them. And if our good resolutions are wanting in sincerity, they must of necessity be also wanting in perseverance ; they can be only precarious, fugitive, fleeting, and they can exercise no influence on our conduct which we do not desire to change at all.

Let us be a little more loyal and sincere towards God. He does not employ duplicity and hypocrisy towards us. He pardons us sincerely—He pardons us with all His heart and in such a way that in Him there remains not the smallest shadow of aversion with regard to us, but love alone, and tenderness, and the ready will to do us good—well disposed never to abandon us provided He is not first abandoned by us. "He deserts none, if not first deserted Himself." Such is the way we are treated by God ; shall our conduct towards Him be of a different character ? Let us reflect seriously on this point and let us resolve to do what is required of us for the future

Twenty-fifth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE SIGNS OF TRUE CONTRITION AND OF SINCERE PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

In the preceding instructions I have endeavoured to explain at considerable length the nature of Contrition and of the purpose of Amendment such as are demanded of us by God as a condition for granting us the grace of the sacrament of Penance. Yet in spite of all the explanations I have attempted with reference to this subject, there is still room for self-deception, precisely because we are concerned with two interior and hidden acts, which have their being in the heart and will, and in reference to which we may easily be led to mistake one thing for another and thus confound true penance with false penance.

What, then, are we to do in order to assure our conscience as far as possible on this all-important point from which both the validity of the sacrament and the safety of our soul depend? We must consider the effects produced in us by our detestation of sin and by our resolution to avoid sin; and we must take note of certain exterior signs, and if we find they exist we are safe in concluding that our penance cannot be regarded as doubtful; or if they do not give us that absolute and infallible certainty which we cannot have in this life, they, at the very least, furnish us with a well-grounded and reasonable confidence which will be sufficient to calm all our fears. In order, then, to render the instructions on contrition and purpose of amendment as complete as possible, I shall now proceed to indicate these signs or marks, so as to enable you to judge whether they are found within you or not.

1. *The first sign* consists in preserving, even after confession, a sorrowing memory of our sins. The reason is that real sorrow does not disappear and vanish quickly, but of its very nature lasts on, at least for some time.

Hence those penitents who as soon as they have confessed their sins—and even very grave and very numerous sins—immediately forget all about them and lose all feelings of sorrow and remorse for them afford good grounds for suspecting that their dispositions have been only superficial and illusory. This was not the character of the contrition of those penitents we read of in Sacred Scripture or ecclesiastical history. Thus David was assured by the Prophet sent by God that his sin had been pardoned. *The Lord hath taken away thy sin* [1]; yet he did not cease to weep that sin incessantly: *My sin is always before me.*[2] In like manner Mary Magdalene, though assured of her pardon by the very words of our Lord Himself did not cease to weep and expiate her sins till the end of her life. It was the same with St. Peter, St. Augustine, and countless others.

I recognize indeed that in souls like these God willed to give us perfect models of penance, and that just as there are different degrees in the quality and intensity of contrition so also are there various degrees in its effects. But these examples prove at least that sorrow for sin is not brief and fleeting but continuous and lasting; and consequently that those sinners who leave behind them at the feet of the confessor both their sins and sorrow for their sins, have good reason to fear that their dispositions have not been sincere, for the simple reason that their sorrow has left so little impression on them; whereas on the other hand those who after confession endeavour to make their contrition habitual afford a strong presumption that their disposition has been and is sincere.

From this first sign follow three others which offer a still stronger presumption of the value of our dispositions, and these consist in promptly removing the causes of sin; in promptly repairing the ravages caused by sin; and in promptly having recourse to the remedies against sin:—

(*a*) *Promptly removing the usual causes of our sins.* I do not refer precisely to those occasions which are called proximate, as I shall have to speak expressly on this point later on, but I here speak in general of all those things that exercise a certain influence with reference to our ordinary failings, and which might easily lead us to fall into these failings again, although strictly speaking they cannot be called proximate occasions. For instance, a certain want of restraint in the use of the eyes, a certain frequentation of the company of persons of the opposite sex, certain amusements, certain representations, and excessive dissipations. Such things should be avoided by all those who profess to hate sin and to desire to avoid it—it is not possible, or at least it is very difficult, to avoid sin if we continue to remain near those causes that lead to it or produce it. The same causes will be always likely to make the same impressions on our soul; and the same impressions will be always likely to lead us into the same faults or failings.

If, then, you show that you are anxious and careful to shun, as far as possible, the usual sources of your sins ; if you show that you are ready and willing to fly certain places, certain persons, certain amusements and pastimes, certain unrestrained thoughts that you find to be an occasion of temptation and danger, then it is a sign that you detest sin and that your contrition is sincere. A sacrifice such as this is not light, and can only be the effect of a sincere change and of a resolute will, in the same way as abstinence from certain kinds of food that would be otherwise highly agreeable but which are rejected because likely to prove injurious, is a clear sign that a person who is ill desires to recover. But if, on the contrary, all is over once confession is ended, and if you continue in the same imprudent courses, in the same career of dissipation and unrestrained freedom of thought and action, your protestation of penance and of purpose of amendment are vain and empty—the very precautions you omit to take prove that your intention is not sincere.

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[1] 2 Kings xii. 13.

[2] Ps. l. v.

(*b*) *Promptly repairing the evil effects of sin that still remain*, or, in other words, doing at once all that you can and ought to do.

Besides the injury they do to God, many sins leave behind them consequences injurious to one's neighbour. Thus the consequence of the wrong done by you to another survives in the enmity he still bears you ; the consequence of robbery or of unjust gains survives in the loss which your neighbour still suffers in his property ; the consequence of calumny and detraction lives on in the loss which your neighbour undergoes in his reputation ; and so on with the rest. Now if you have really brought sentiments of sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment with you to the sacrament of Penance, you must promptly repair the pernicious results of your sin—though you cannot retract the sin itself, you must at least destroy the injurious consequences that spring from it and which still live on.

If I see that you are ready to satisfy your obligations in this respect, I shall have good grounds for deciding that you are really converted ; for it is impossible that you should resolve on a sacrifice so difficult and painful as that of restoring something you could still retain, humiliating yourself before some person you have offended, retracting whatever you have falsely or wrongfully said, if you were converted only in appearance and not in reality. One must be truly contrite to condemn oneself to sacrifices of this nature. But on the other hand, there is all to fear in the case of those who make no attempt to do all that is possible to repair the harm they have caused.

Not to have fulfilled certain obligations before confession, when it was possible to do so ; deferring these obligations until after confession ; and, even after confession, putting them off still further is a clear sign of an inefficacious and irresolute will. But, you may say, does it not suffice to attend to them after confession ? And why, I ask in return, why after ? Would it not be better to anticipate and to see to them before confession ? I do not say there is a strict obligation to discharge them before confession ; but the fact of your wishing to see to them only after confession affords reasonable grounds for suspecting that you will not do so even then, and that you do not do so beforehand because you have no real intention of doing so afterwards. And this in fact is what happens in the case of only too many penitents who always bring to the sacred tribunal the same grave obligations they never discharge, and thus expose the sacrament of Penance to the evident risk of nullity or profanation. What clearer sign could there be of the complete absence of the requisite dispositions ?

(*c*) *Promptly having recourse to the remedies against sin*, in other words, making use of the necessary and indispensable means to avoid falling any more. A man who desires to preserve himself free from certain dangers to which he is frequently exposed willingly embraces the methods and the rule of life which are laid down for his preservation, and follows them undeviatingly.

In the same way, if we wish to be assured of our good dispositions, let us see how far we are disposed to put into practice the means we already know to be necessary to avoid sin, whether we already know these means of ourselves or learn them from our confessor ; for instance daily meditation on the more important and more striking truths of faith ; the reading of some pious book ; an occasional visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament ; the frequentation of the sacraments ; the practice of penance and mortification. But if you are altogether disinclined to undergo the slightest inconvenience, if everything fatigues and burdens you, if you even go so far as to argue with your confessor about the directions he lays down for you, or if you readily promise to perform all he suggests, merely in order to obtain absolution, and without any real intention of doing anything, you have in all that another unmistakable sign of the absence of the proper dispositions.

2. But the clearest and most decisive sign of all is the change of life and conduct, or at least the care taken not to fall into mortal sin for a long time. This is the touchstone to determine the sincerity of our dispositions. And in fact it is hardly possible to imagine how a contrition and a purpose of amendment, such as we have seen are required of us, can produce no good effect on our life and conduct.

Cut a tree with a strong blow of an axe ; how do you come to know whether the cut has ruined the tree or not ? If you see its leaves gradually wither and fall away, and its branches dry up and snap off from the trunk, it is a clear sign that the wound was deep ; but if the tree still remains as before, with green leaves and flourishing branches, it is a sign that the cut was only superficial and has hardly done more than penetrate the bark. In like manner, if after confession we observe genuine reform, amendment, care and attention devoted to persevering firmly in the grace of God, it must be admitted that contrition has really touched the heart; but if after confession you remain just as you were before—intemperate and drunkards, calumniators and blasphemers, unchaste and sensual—we must only conclude that those confessions, which leave all unchanged, are completely superficial and illusory.

This falling back again into habitual faults, this more or less rapid change from sin to penance and from penance to sin, cannot be conciliated with sincere sorrow and with a strong, firm and resolute will to sin no more. The Fathers are unanimous on this point: "Vain is the penance when there is no emendation; he is a scoffer, not a penitent, who still keeps on doing that for which he pretends to be sorry."

Do not allege that the will is changeable, that human nature is very frail, and that the sacrament of Penance does not render us impeccable. All this is very true, but it does not justify those to whom I refer. There are two classes of persons who relapse into sin. Some there are who do indeed fall again, but rarely, not easily, and only after many struggles and combats; while, to avoid the fear of falling again they take certain precautions, make use of certain means, and have recourse to certain pious practices; and finally a diminution of the number of their sins, a change for the better in their lives, is noticeable in the long run. The other class, on the contrary, fall at every step, fall with the same ease and frequency, fall carelessly and unresistingly, without ever a thought on taking precautions against falling. Now if you belong to the first class, it is quite possible that your fall is purely the effect of human frailty, or of the violence of passion, or temptation; and in this case your fall is no sufficient motive for distrusting or fearing the sincerity of your confessions—nay, you have every reason to hope that by faithfully continuing to watch over yourself, you will gradually diminish the number of your sins, and at length succeed in banishing them completely. But if, on the contrary, you belong to the second class—those, that is, who devote neither care nor attention to the amendment of their lives whose life is one long unbroken chain of confessions and sins—in that case your fall can be ascribed to no other cause than to the absence of the proper dispositions.

Moreover, while it is true that our will is naturally changeable, it is also true that we do not find it so light or changeable in any of the other concerns of our lives. If, for instance, you conceive hatred towards some one, it takes not a little to make you change your feelings towards him ; and even if with God's help you do succeed in rejecting those feelings, you cannot still prevent yourself from experiencing a revival of them if you happen by chance to meet him. What sort, then, is the hatred you have conceived against sin, if you allow yourself to be conquered on the very first occasion, the very first trial ? A hatred light and fleeting like this is no true, genuine hatred.

In the same way in the other concerns of your life, when once you have formed a resolution or settled on a fixed purpose, you do not change thus easily or lightly. When, for example, you have learned that a particular class of food or drink may prove injurious to your health, and when you have determined to abstain from it for the future, you continue firm in your resolution, no matter how much you feel drawn by the desire of tasting it once more. It is the same in the case of business or undertakings from which you have suffered loss. Now, whence arises such great firmness in maintaining your other resolutions, and such great readiness to break that of sinning no more ?—a resolution which should be the firmest of all, which should embrace all times, and which should fortify you with the disposition to lose your life rather than offend God. I will tell you whence it arises—it arises from this, that your will was never decided and resolute as it should have been ; and hence instead of saying that it is inconstant and changeable, it would be more true to say that in your case that it has never changed at all.

This statement is only too well confirmed by the consideration of the sacrament of Penance itself which while it does not render us impeccable at least helps us not to sin. It is in fact certain that as often as you receive it with the requisite dispositions, besides sanctifying grace which cancels sin, it also confers on us another grace which is called sacramental, and which consists in certain special lights and helps destined to fortify us against temptation, and to establish and strengthen us in the grace we have received. This being understood, how are we to suppose that you have received from the sacrament that grace of strength, power, firmness, and stability, if you at once fall back into the same sins, and if your life continues to be more or less always the same ? If the sacrament of Penance, which you have so often received, has not wrought in you the effect of rendering you less prone to sin and less ready to fall into it, it has consequently been null and void in your case—and that certainly through defect of the requisite dispositions.

Such, then, is the all-important consideration to be faced by all those whose confessions and sins, whose sins and confessions, are allowed to march calmly on side by side.

Whenever conscience reproaches you with some grave sin of the past you quickly console yourself with the reflection that you have already confessed it, and consequently have already obtained pardon of it; but, if you have shown yourself ready and willing to fall into the same sin again and again, it is far from certain that your confessions were sincere, and hence, instead of affording grounds for security, these confessions should rather be carefully examined and scrutinized so as to be certain whether they were accompanied with genuine sorrow and sincere purpose of amendment.

To conclude: I have now set forth the principal signs from which to deduce the genuineness of contrition and purpose of amendment. Let us, then, cast aside all vain illusions that might easily be allowed to deceive us, and let us attend only to the signs indicated. These are the *fruits worthy of penance* of which our Lord speaks in the Gospel—not simply leaves and flowers, consisting only in words and protestations and empty appearances and professions, but true and solid fruits, such as I have indicated—that is to say, a sorrowing memory of the sins committed, the avoidance of everything that could incite us to repeat them, the discharge of the obligations arising from the fact of having committed them, the practice of the means necessary to lead a good life, and finally a serious reform in conduct and actions.

Should you have the consolation to find these fruits within yourselves, be happy and at peace; but if not I can offer no other advice than to review your past confessions, and see how far they have been accompanied by the requisite dispositions of sorrow and purpose of amendment. What is to be done in case you find that these are wanting will be explained on a future occasion when I come to speak of General Confession.

Twenty-sixth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE OCCASIONS OF SIN

AMONGST the various signs indicated as a means of determining the sincerity of contrition and purpose of amendment requisite for the sacrament of Penance I mentioned the avoidance of all that might lead us to sin again. In doing so, however, I did not aim at speaking in detail of what theologians call *dangerous occasions.* It is a subject which claims a special instruction ; for we cannot consider the question of dangerous occasions merely in the light of a sign of contrition—we must also regard them under the aspect of the rigorous and definite obligation which exists with regard to them, and which only too commonly is allowed to pass without recognition.

All admit that to receive the grace of the sacrament of Penance the intention to avoid sin is absolutely necessary ; not so, however, with regard to the obligation of avoiding the occasion of sin. And hence it is that relying on the pretext that they are disposed to avoid sin, penitents sometimes claim they ought to be absolved, even though they are far from being disposed to avoid the occasion of their sin. Now this is a serious error—an error that makes sin live on in the soul, and renders confession sacrilegious and null. No matter how firm a resolution not to sin any more you may claim to have, as long as you are not also disposed to avoid the occasions of sin, you will never receive the grace of the sacrament. Before dwelling, however, on the necessity of avoiding the occasions of sin, it will be well to distinguish the various sorts of occasions, and to point out in what they properly consist.

By the occasions of sin we understand all that causes sin or leads to sin ; and as every occasion does not cause sin in the same manner or degree, we consequently divide the occasions of sin into two classes —remote and proximate.

A *remote* occasion is that in which we sin but rarely, even though we frequently find ourselves placed in that occasion. The fewness of the sins committed by us in spite of the fact that we are frequently exposed to the particular occasion is a proof that those sins must be attributed to some other cause than the force of the occasion in question.

And hence the occasion is called remote, because the danger of sinning is remote.

A *proximate* occasion is that in which we sin almost as often as we find ourselves exposed to it; or which even though we have no personal experience of it, is in itself of such force that it affords a well-grounded probability or a moral certainty that those who find themselves exposed to it will fall, owing to the strong and positive and powerful influence it exercises in the direction of sin.

Now, whatever leads us frequently into sin, and whatever be the nature of the sin into which it leads us, is always a *proximate* occasion of sin in our regard. Bear these two points well in mind, if you wish to form an accurate idea of the occasions of which I speak.

1. In the first place I say *whatever leads us frequently into sin.*—Consequently the occasion of sin will be not only a person of another sex, but every other person and thing. The former is the most common, the most powerful, and the most dangerous kind of occasion, but it is not the only occasion—the proximate occasion may be also a book, an evil companion, a conversation, a public-house, a play, a business, a trade, an employment, and so on. It is the sinful effect that follows that is to be considered, rather than the nature of the cause from which that effect arises.

Of these things there are some which by their very nature and intrinsic malice lead to sin, and constitute that class of proximate occasion which we call *absolute*, which is always and ever a proximate occasion for all persons, and which never ceases to be such, because such is its very nature, and the nature of a thing does not change. Such, for instance, would be the reading of an obscene book, the sight of an obscene picture, or company-keeping with corrupt and depraved persons. There are other occasions which lead us into sin, not because they are bad in themselves, but in consequence of our own individual disposition and tendencies; and these constitute that kind of proximate occasion which we call *relative*, which usually becomes a proximate occasion little by little, and which can cease to be a proximate occasion if our inclinations and circumstances should happen to change in the course of time; for instance, a certain place, or a person, or an amusement may be a matter of complete indifference to others, and yet may exercise an evil influence over you. But whether that person or place or thing leads us to sin of its own nature, or whether it leads us to sin in consequence of our special individual weakness, does not matter—it is always an occasion of sin in the particular case. Poison is always poison to each and all; but a good and wholesome food may become a poison to some; and in that case are not these bound to abstain from using it?

From this you will understand how it is that certain things are forbidden to you which are not forbidden to others, and how it is consequently that you have no right to complain on this account and say, "Why cannot I go to such and such a house, such and such an amusement, such and such a person, when so many other persons are allowed to go?" Let those who reason in this way, answer another question "There are to be met with certain persons who can safely encounter all sorts of toil and fatigue without suffering the slightest harm; are you ready to imitate them?" "Cannot one do what another succeeds in doing? are not they who succeed men just like myself?" "Yes," you will reply, "but temperaments and dispositions are different; and were I, weak as I am, to attempt to do all that they do, I should ere long put an end to my life." You are perfectly right. Now apply your reasoning to the case in question. Others can go to such and such a house, visit such and such a person, take part in such and such an amusement without jeopardizing their souls; but not so you; and the reason of this difference is to be sought in the different effect which these things produce on you in comparison with the effect they produce in the others to whom you allude.

Once this principle is thoroughly grasped it will be easy to settle the various questions that are proposed as to whether certain balls, theatres, plays, and amusements are permissible or not. I could easily bring forward reasons to show that these amusements are dangerous; but without entering so deeply into the question, I limit myself to this one consideration: What impression do these amusements make on your mind? and what effect do they produce in you? Here we have a simple rule enabling you to decide whether they are lawful or not in your case, instead of pretending blindly to justify yourself by the example of others. The care of our salvation is our own personal concern; personal, then, must be the obligation to avoid the danger of risking the loss of it.

2. In the second place I have observed that the occasion is proximate, *whatever be the nature of the sin to which it frequently leads us*—that is to say, even when it is not a sin of impurity or sensuality, as some might imagine, but other kinds of sin as well. The occasion can be one of blasphemy and perjury, detraction and calumny, anger and quarrelling, intemperance and drunkenness, fraud and injustice—or even grave neglect of the duties of one's state. All these, in a word, are sins which drag the soul down to hell; whatever, then, may be the sin to which we are frequently exposed, the occasion will be proximate.

I should add, moreover, that it is not even necessary that the sins to which the occasion inclines us should be exterior sins of action, which, in fact, owing to the obstacles they encounter, are not always easy to commit—it is enough that you fall into interior sins of thought and desire. For cannot these sins also be mortal sins, and are there not souls who suffer eternal damnation on account of them ?

3. Finally, to constitute an occasion of sin, it is not necessary that you should fall the very moment in which you find yourself in the occasion—it is enough that your fall is to be attributed to this cause. You have, for instance, visited a person whom you love, and nothing wrong happened on that occasion. The person is no longer present to your eyes, but his or her image remains on in your mind and later on, perhaps, leads to evil thoughts and desires. If so should not these sins be attributed to that occasion ?

Bearing in mind these rules, which admit of no exception whatever, let us now see how far we are *bound to avoid the occasions* of sin.

1. First of all there is no special obligation binding us to fly remote occasions, simply because it would be impossible ; *otherwise*, as St. Paul says, *you must needs go out of this world.*[1] And, in fact, what is there in the world that cannot be, at least remotely, an occasion of sin ? But while it is not possible to avoid them all, there are very many that can be avoided, and a Christian who has his salvation at heart will take care to avoid them as far as he can, especially those which, while not quite proximate, are nevertheless not altogether remote ; and which while not evidently dangerous like the former, are nevertheless so far dangerous that we cannot escape unhurt without great prudence and much difficulty. This class of occasions holds a kind of intermediate place between remote and proximate occasions ; and to this class belong certain amusements, certain parties and reunions, imprudent frequentation of the company of persons of another sex, certain unguarded liberties in look and action, and so on.

If to preserve the health of the body we carefully avoid not only all that is undoubtedly injurious, but also all that may prove more or less dangerous, should we not at the very least take the same precautions to preserve the health of the soul ? To seek and to cultivate these occasions can only arise from the fact that we love them. Now in Holy Scripture God, without any distinction between proximate and remote occasions, declares that *he who loves the danger will perish therein.* We cannot then make it our rule to regard as lawful all the occasions which do not strictly belong to the class of proximate occasions—a pernicious maxim in accordance with which it is impossible to lead a good life and be preserved from sin.

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[1] Cor. v. 10.

2. But as regards those occasions which are clearly proximate, whether they are such of their very nature, or are such only simply with respect to the individual, there is a rigorous and incontestable obligation to avoid them, shun them, abandon them; otherwise our penance is only a dream or an illusion.

(*a*) First of all, without avoiding the occasion there can be no true hatred of the sin. How in fact do you behave with regard to the things you hate? You abhor their proximity, you cannot abide their presence, you carefully shun encountering them. When you have taken an aversion to a person, you are unwilling to have anything whatever to do with him. How then can you say you hate sin with that complete and irreconcilable hatred that is requisite, if at the same time you love the occasion of it, and cherish affection and attachment to the things that make you fall into it? Attachment to the danger is an evident proof that the attachment to sin still remains.

Furthermore, it is not possible under such circumstances to conceive a sincere resolution of sinning no more. To will not to sin, and at the same time to will all that is morally connected with sin, is a contradiction in terms. Whoever, says St. Thomas, wills a cause, from which a given effect usually and necessarily follows, wills that effect itself. It is impossible, then, to reconcile contrition and the resolution of sinning no more, with voluntary persistence in the occasion. But to all this, certain penitents who do not wish to be obliged to fly the occasion of sin, will make various objections. Let us hear them:—

They begin by saying that even though they do expose themselves afresh to the occasion, they have the good intention to persevere and not fall again. Granted; but your intention does not remove, and does not even lessen the danger that is intrinsic to, the occasion, and hence it does not suffice to preserve you from falling again. The devil cares but little for your good intentions—he will even be the first to suggest them to you, so as to secure your return to the occasion. He knows well how far the occasion is capable of fascinating and perverting you, and he also knows that in its presence all your good resolutions and all your projects fall to the ground and are no sufficient counterbalance to the guilty passion that will then assail you and dominate you completely. This effect, which you are unwilling to foresee when returning to the occasion, the devil foresees very clearly, and hence he leaves you your good resolutions; he even excites them in you, well knowing that he is sure to drag you once more into sin, provided you expose yourself anew to the danger.

"But," you will urge, "I am firmly resolved not to fall any more, and not to consent to any sin." But what grounds have you to flatter yourself that you will be faithful, when experience convinces you of the contrary—when you have already fallen over and over again? How can you persuade yourself that your present resolution will be more successful than its predecessors which have always been without effect.

"But I will take greater care and precautions, I will stand on my guard, I will recommend myself to God." All this is empty talk, which only serves to accuse you of infidelity or presumption—of *infidelity*, if you imagine you are able by your own strength to resist the temptations which are sure to assail you in the circumstances in which you are about to place yourself; of *presumption*, if you imagine that while you remain in the occasion the Lord will accord you the help you need in order to avoid falling again. God does not distribute His graces according to our caprices, nor will He give the grace of resistance when you should rather beg the grace of flight. We can, indeed, confidently rely on the assistance of God in the occasions that come on us by surprise or in which we find ourselves placed by unavoidable motives of justice, obedience, or charity, but not in those into which we throw ourselves voluntarily; for He openly threatens that in such cases He will leave us to ourselves, and allow us to fall: *He who loves the danger shall perish therein*—a threat which if not understood of proximate occasions at the very least, to what then is it to be applied? It is in vain, then, that you hope for victory since you can expect it neither from God nor from yourself.

To be thoroughly convinced on this point you will acknowledge that penance is not genuine as long as one preserves a sinful intention. Now, the intention of returning to the occasion is certainly sinful since avoidance of the occasion is formally commended by God. All the Fathers and all the theologians are unanimous in teaching that the same law that forbids us to sin, forbids us also to expose ourselves to the danger of sinning. And, in truth, what kind of law would be that which while forbidding me to sin would permit me to stand on the brink of the abyss of sin? If, then, we would not accuse God of stupidity, we must acknowledge that there is a law forbidding us to expose ourselves to danger.

And in any event, have we not the unmistakable statement of Jesus Christ in the Gospel? Speaking, under the veil of a metaphor, of the occasions leading to sin, He thus expresses Himself: "If your eye is an occasion of sin to you, pluck it out and cast it away from you—*If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.*[1] In like manner, if your hand or your foot is an occasion of sin to you, cut them off and cast them away.—*And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee.*[1] But this command, O Lord, is too severe—is it not enough to close the eye and bind the hand or foot—to continue the occasion while taking care not to sin? No, answered Jesus Christ, he who remains voluntarily in the occasion of sin transgresses My law. Flight and detachment, detachment and flight—*pluck it out, cut it off, cast it from thee.*

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[1] Matt. v. 29.

Could He have spoken more clearly to show us the necessity of abandoning the occasion of sin, and to cut short all the pretexts that are usually alleged to dispense ourselves from this obligation?

"But that person is very dear to me." Is that person dearer to you than your eye, your hand, or your foot? The dearer, the more dangerous and all the greater the necessity of avoiding that presence.

"But I have need of that person, and to separate would be the cause of considerable injury to my interests." I have still the same answer—Is that person more necessary to you than your eye, your hand, or your foot? And why speak of your interests? The foremost interest, the one thing necessary, is it not that of your soul?

"But I am under a thousand obligations to that person; I am bound to him or her by a thousand titles." There can be no obligation of the kind in the case, since your first obligation is to God and to yourself.

"But everyone will wonder and begin to talk if I am seen no longer visiting that house?" Alas, they talk only too much at present, and with far greater reason. It would consequently be only fair that since your scandal is public and well known, the separation should be equally so. If you have hitherto disregarded the world's remarks and continued in a scandalous relationship, why are you ready to pay attention to them when it comes to a question of breaking it off and of contributing thus to your neighbour's edification and the salvation of your own soul?

"I will break it off," another may say, "but permit me to do so little by little and retire without attracting attention, and with good grace." Now this is precisely the way never to succeed in doing it. If you return once, you will return a second and a third time, and thus you will keep on till you never give it up, and finally succeed in damning your soul. You will accomplish nothing if you do not resolutely take the step ordered by Jesus Christ when He said: *pluck it out; cut it off; cast it from thee.*

Make no mistake, then,—there is no motive, neither of good intention, nor interest, nor attachment, nor gratitude, nor fitness, that can make it lawful for you to continue in the occasion of sin whether by voluntary seeking it elsewhere, or, what is worse, by retaining it near you. You must separate yourself from it at all costs, and this is not merely a simple advice given by your confessor to guard against future sins, but it is a strict obligation indispensable towards the cancelling of your present sins.

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[1] Matt. xviii. 8.

You will hence conclude that if to avoid the occasion is a command, you consequently commit a sin as often as you expose yourself to the occasion, even though it should happen that no evil result actually follows. At confession, therefore, you must accuse yourself, not only of the sins you have committed, but also of the number of times you have exposed yourself to the occasion of committing them. In the second place you will conclude that you should take no account of the absolutions you have received while you remained in the occasion, because they are fundamentally null and sacrilegious.

There is just one single exception in this matter. All that has been thus far said must be understood of those occasions only that are voluntary, free, and avoidable, and not of those that are involuntary and morally unavoidable, and cannot be abandoned without evident danger of scandal or defamation, such, for instance, as the necessity of living at your parents' home when there happens to be a person who is a continual and efficacious occasion of sin. In this case what is to be done ? If you cannot avoid the occasion, you must at least endeavour to lessen or remove the danger by taking all the precautions in your power.

First of all, you should repress all affection for the necessity in which you find yourself, and you should even regard it as a great misfortune to be placed in such a position as not to be able to avoid it.

In the second place, if you cannot avoid the danger altogether, you should shun it as far as possible by avoiding those particular times, or circumstances, or meetings, which experience has taught you are the more dangerous for you.

Finally, you should use the greatest care and vigilance ; recommend yourself fervently to God ; and willingly have recourse to the means which your confessor will suggest to preserve you from sin.

This, then, is what you must do in order that the occasion can be truly called involuntary on your part, and in order that you can give to God and to your confessor a proof of the sincerity of your dispositions.

I should, however, warn you against perverting this doctrine by alleging the existence of necessity in those occasions which can be avoided and which are actually avoided when interest, pride, a new passion, or some other motive of human respect demands it. On this point you should not be your own judge; but you should refer the matter to the judgment of your confessor, whose business it is to decide whether your occasion is necessary or not, or whether it is proximate or remote.

It should be clearly borne in mind that there are two illusions into which penitents often fall with regard to the occasions of sin, both of them arising from corruption of heart and will which refuses to be detached from the objects it loves. The first consists in persuading oneself that an occasion is necessary when it is not really so; the second in imagining that an occasion is not proximate whereas it is so in reality. Now, if you do not desire to remain voluntarily under this delusion, you must carefully explain all the circumstances of the case to the confessor without disguise or concealment; and be prepared and disposed to follow his advice and direction in all things.

A final observation. When bowed down by confusion and shame, we carry our faults to the tribunal of Penance, we sometimes seek to excuse them on the score of our frailty and the force of the occasion; but when it comes to a question of avoiding those occasions by shunning the danger if that is possible, or if not, by being strictly on our guard, then we no longer remember our frailty nor the force of the occasion, and we are no longer ready to hear these measures of precaution and flight spoken of. Now, is not this evident contradiction? Does it not amount to clear and inexcusable self-condemnation before God?

We must, then, decide once for all, and be well persuaded that we cannot at one and the same time serve God and our passions, as only too many try to do who desire to be Christians according to their own way, and not according to the ways and designs of God; it is a vain and deceitful desire, for there never has been found, and there never can be found, a means of reconciling these two things. We must of necessity decide either for one or for the other—there is simply no other alternative.

CHAPTER X

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—*(continued)*

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

IX.—CONFESSION—ITS UTILITY AND NECESSITY

36. — Importance of the subject. THUS far regarding contrition. Turning now to confession, which is the second part of Penance, the care and diligence the pastor should devote to its explanation will be evidenced from the fact that it is the firm persuasion of almost every truly pious soul, that whatever sanctity, piety, or devotion has been preserved in the Church through the infinite goodness of God, must in great part be ascribed to confession. And hence it should cause no surprise if the enemy of the human race, in his endeavour to destroy the very foundations of the Catholic Faith, should through his satellites and the ministers of his impiety, have devoted all his might to attacking and overthrowing this citadel of Christian virtue. It should accordingly be first of all shown that the institution of confession is not only highly advantageous to us, but also very necessary.

(*a*) Because useful and necessary to salvation. While admitting that contrition blots out sin, who is ignorant of the fact that to do so it must be so strong, so keen, so intense, that the bitterness of sorrow must be equal or proportioned to the enormity of the sins committed? and since very few indeed could hope to reach this grade of contrition, it followed that few could hope for pardon of their sins in this way. It was consequently necessary that our Lord in His infinite mercy should provide for the salvation of all in an easier way, and this He has done in an admirable manner by giving to His Church the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

37.—Relation between contrition and confession. In accordance, then, with the teaching of the Catholic Faith, we are bound to believe and unreservedly profess that whoever is so disposed as to be sincerely sorry for his sins, and at the same time is resolved never to sin any more—even though he has not that contrition which suffices of itself to obtain pardon

—all his sins are remitted and pardoned by the power of the keys on his confessing them properly to a priest. With good reason, then, has it been proclaimed by all the holy Fathers that the gate of heaven has been thrown open to us through the keys of the Church—a truth that can no longer be called into doubt since the Decree of the Council of Florence has declared that the effect of Penance is absolution from sin.

(*b*) Because it is a remedy against sin and a help towards amendment of life.

A further consideration to show us the advantages of confession is this, that experience teaches that nothing is so useful in reforming the morals of those whose life has hitherto been depraved as to disclose from time to time all their hidden thoughts, words, and actions to a prudent and faithful friend who can help them by word and work. In the same way and for the same reason it cannot but be regarded as highly salutary to those who are troubled by the consciousness of sins committed to lay bare the diseases and wounds of their soul to the priest, who acts in the capacity of Christ's vicar, and who is bound by the strictest of all laws to perpetual silence and secrecy. By doing this, they will at once find awaiting them a remedy which possesses the heavenly property, not only of healing their present malady, but also of fortifying their souls in such a way as to render them less likely to fall into the same class of disease or infirmity for the future.

(*c*) Because it helps to save society from being deluged by crime.

Another advantage must not be lost sight of and it is, that confession very closely concerns the foundations of social order. It is an established fact that if you take away sacramental confession from Christian society the world will ere long be deluged with monstrous and hidden crimes—crimes, too, with others still more grave, which later on men will not blush to commit openly once they have become depraved by the habit of evil-doing; while, on the other hand, the shame that attends confession of one's sins bridles desire and licentiousness, and imposes a check on perversity.

X.—NATURE AND INSTITUTION OF CONFESSION

38.—Nature and definition of confession.

Having now explained the advantages of confession, the pastor will next make known its nature and efficacy. Confession is thus defined: "An accusation of one's sins made sacramentally to obtain pardon through the power of the keys."

Rightly is it called an *accusation* because we are not to tell our sins as if we boasted of them, after the example of those *who are glad when they have done evil ;* [1] nor are we to relate them as if our purpose was to afford amusement to our hearers ; but we must enumerate them with the intention of accusing ourselves, and with the desire, as it were, of avenging them on ourselves.

Our object in confessing our sins is to obtain pardon of them ; for the tribunal of Penance is very different from human tribunals and criminal trials, in which penalty and punishment, not acquittal and pardon, are meted out to those who confess their guilt.

The holy Fathers seem to have defined confession more or less according to the same idea, though not in the same identical words ; St. Augustine, for instance, says " Confession is the disclosing of a hidden disease in the hope of obtaining pardon ; " and St. Gregory : " Confession is a detestation of sins." These two definitions being as they are contained in the definition given above, can be easily accorded therewith.

39. — Confession instituted by Christ.

In the next place, it will be the pastor's duty —a duty of the very gravest consequence and importance—to teach and show the faithful in the most unmistakable way that this sacrament has been instituted in His infinite goodness and mercy by Christ our Lord *who hath done all things well,* solely for the sake of our salvation.

For, after His resurrection, when His Apostles were gathered together one day, He breathed on them and said : *Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven ; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained.* [2] Now, in giving to His priests the power of retaining and of remitting sin, it is evident that our Lord constituted them judges in this matter.

40.—Other scriptural passages bearing on the point.

This also He seems to have signified when having raised Lazarus from the dead He charged the Apostles to loose him from the cloths that bound him. St. Augustine thus explains this passage : " Priests," he says, "can now accomplish more, and can show much more kindness to those who confess, by remitting their sins—for in handing over Lazarus, whom He had already raised from the dead, to be loosed by the hands of His Apostles, He thus signified that the power of loosing is given to His priests."

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[1] Prov. ii. 14.

[2] John xx. 22, 23.

It was to teach the same truth that our Lord ordered those whom He had cured from leprosy along the way to *go and show themselves to the priests* [1] and submit themselves to their judgment.

XI.—NECESSITY AND OBLIGATION OF CONFESSION

41.—The power of remitting and retaining sins involves the necessity of confession to a priest.

Now as our Lord bestowed on His priests the power of remitting and retaining sin, it is clear that priests are thereby appointed judges of the matter; and as, according to the wise remark of the Council of Trent, it is impossible to form a just judgment on any case, or preserve the rules of justice in apportioning punishment to crime, if the charge has not been first thoroughly examined and sifted, it follows that penitents must make known every one of their sins to the priest by means of confession.

All this, then, the pastor will explain conformably to the Decrees of the Council of Trent and the uniform teaching of the Catholic Church. For on carefully reading the holy Fathers we shall everywhere find the clearest testimonies all tending to confirm the truth that this sacrament was instituted by Christ our Lord, and that the law of sacramental confession, called *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis* by the Greeks, is to be received as true Gospel teaching. And if we consult the figures of the Old Testament it will be seen that the various kinds of sacrifice offered by the priests in expiation of different sorts of sin undoubtedly have reference to confession.

42.—Certain ceremonies accompanying confession.

But while the faithful are to be taught that confession was instituted by our Lord and Saviour, they should also be reminded that the Church has by her authority added certain rites and solemn ceremonies which, though not essential to the sacrament, nevertheless serve to display its dignity, enkindle penitents with piety, and prepare them to receive the grace of God more readily. And truly, when, with bare head and downcast look, we cast ourselves at the feet of the priest, lift up our suppliant hands, and while confessing our sins display various other signs of Christian humility which are not essential to the sacrament, all this shows us clearly that we must recognize the heavenly virtues of this sacrament, as well as the necessity of earnestly begging and imploring the divine mercy.

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[1] Luke xvii. 14.

43.—Necessity of confession.

Let no one imagine that though our Lord did indeed institute confession He did not at the same time proclaim its necessity. On the contrary, the faithful should be thoroughly convinced that he who is guilty of mortal sin can be recalled to spiritual life by the sacrament of Confession alone. We see this truth clearly signified in the beautiful figure used by our Lord when, to denote the power of administering this sacrament, He called it *the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.*[1] For just as it is impossible to obtain entrance into a place without the help of him who has charge of the keys of that place, so we see that no one can obtain admission into heaven unless its gates are opened to him by the priests to whose keeping our Lord has entrusted its keys. Otherwise the power of the keys would be useless in the Church, and if admission to heaven could be obtained in any other way, vainly would he to whom that power has been given attempt to prohibit anyone from entering. St. Augustine was thoroughly alive to this fact when he said : " Let no man say : ' I repent in secret before God ; and God in whose power it is to pardon me knows the state of my heart.' Was it in vain, then, that He said : *Whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven ?* Was it in vain, then, that the keys were given to the Church of God ? " Such is also the mind of St. Ambrose which he committed to writing in his book *On Penance* against the heresy of the Novatians, who asserted that the power of remitting sin is reserved to God alone : " Who," he asks, " gives greater honour to God—he who obeys His commands or he who resists them ? God has ordered us to obey His ministers—and in obeying them we honour God alone."

44.—We are bound to tell our sins in confession.

As it is altogether impossible to doubt that our Lord has enacted and established the law of confession, it now remains to be seen who are bound to obey this law, at what age, and what time of the year.

And in the first place, it is certain in accordance with the canon of the Lateran Council which begins with the words : *Omnis utriusque sexus*, that no one is bound by the law of confession before arriving at the use of reason—an age which cannot, however, be fixed at any precise and definite number of years. It may, however, be accepted as a general principle that confession becomes obligatory on children as soon as they are able to discern good from evil, and begin to be capable of malice. For as soon as each one reaches that period of life when the affair of his eternal salvation claims his attention, from that very moment he is bound to confess his sins to the priest, simply because there is other means of salvation for one whose conscience is stained by mortal sin.

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[1] Matt. xvi. 19.

45.—At least once a year and in certain special circumstances. In the canon already referred to, the Church has defined the time within which we are specially bound to go to confession, ordering all the faithful to confess their sins at least once a year.

But if we attend to the obligations imposed on us by the interests of our salvation, assuredly shall we not fail to go to confession as often as the danger of death threatens us, or as often as we are about to perform an action which should not be attempted by one who is in the state of sin, such, for instance, as the administration or reception of the sacraments. The same rule should be observed as often as we fear we shall forget some sins we have committed—we cannot confess the sins we do not remember; and we do not obtain pardon of the Lord for our faults if the sacrament of Penance does not efface them by means of confession.

XII.—THE QUALITIES OF CONFESSION

46. — Confession should be entire Now, there are many things to be observed in confession, some of which are essential to the validity of the sacrament, while others are not absolutely necessary; and hence those must be accurately set forth. Nor indeed is there any lack of books and treatises from which to derive sufficient information regarding these several points.

First and foremost the pastor will teach that we must be careful that our confessions be entire and unreserved. We are bound to make known all our mortal sins to the priest. As for venial sins which, as we know, do not separate us from the grace of God and into which we frequently fall, while it is, as the practice of pious souls proves, good and useful to confess them nevertheless they may be omitted without sin, and can be expiated by various other means. But, as we have said, each and every mortal sin must be confessed, even those that are absolutely secret as well as those that are forbidden by the two last commandments of the Decalogue. For it often happens that the latter-mentioned sins inflict deeper wounds on the soul than those which are committed openly and publicly.

Thus it has been defined by the Council of Trent, and thus the Catholic Church has uniformly taught us, as is clear from the testimonies of the Holy Fathers: "No one," says St. Ambrose, "can be justified from his sin without confessing his sin." St. Jerome, also, in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, plainly confirms the same truth when he writes: "When the infernal serpent has secretly bitten anyone, and has infected him with the poison of sin, if that person keeps silent, if he does not do penance, and if he will not discover his wounds to his brother or superior, that superior, who has a tongue ready to heal him, can render him no service." And St. Cyprian, in his sermon on the *Lapsed*, clearly teaches the same doctrine when he says: "Even though these persons have not committed the crime of sacrilege or of trafficking in certificates, nevertheless they intended to do so, and therefore they must contritely confess it to the priest." Such, in short, is the unanimous voice and belief of the Doctors of the Church.

47.—Some circumstances must be mentioned; others need not.

The same care and exactness we usually devote to worldly affairs of importance should be given to confession, and all our efforts should be devoted to the endeavour to heal the wounds of our soul and destroy the roots of sin.

But not only must we confess and declare our mortal sins, but also such circumstances as very considerably aggravate or extenuate the malice of each sin. Some circumstances are so serious that they suffice of themselves to constitute the guilt of mortal sin, and these consequently must always be confessed. If, for instance, one man has killed another, he must explain whether that other was a layman or an ecclesiastic. In the same way, if a man has sinned with a woman, he must state whether she was married, or single, or a relative, or consecrated to God by a vow. All these are circumstances which constitute so many different species of sin, so much so that writers on the sacred sciences call the first fornication; the second adultery; the third, incest; and the fourth, sacrilege. Theft also is a sin; but he who steals a sovereign commits a less grievous sin than he who has taken a hundred or two hundred pounds, or a much more considerable sum, and this is especially the case if that money belonged to the Church. The same remark applies to the circumstances of place and time; but instances are too well known from books to need special mention here. Circumstances such as these, then, must be enumerated in confession; but as for the others which do not considerably aggravate the malice of the sin, they may lawfully be omitted.

48.—Concealment of sin in confession.

So necessary is it, as we have said, that confession should be entire and unreserved, that if anyone were to confess only some of his sins while omitting others that should be confessed, not only does he derive no advantage from that confession, but he even involves himself in a new sin. Such an enumeration of sins as that cannot be called by the name of sacramental confession ; not only that, but the penitent must repeat his confession and accuse himself of having profaned the sanctity of the sacrament by a false confession.

49.—Sins omitted through forgetfulness or carelessness.

But if the confession is not entire, owing to some other cause—either because the penitent forgot some sin, or because though fully resolved to confess his sins in their entirety, he did not examine the recesses of his conscience with perfectly absolute care, he is not bound to repeat his confession—and if, later on, he should remember the sins he has forgotten it will be sufficient to confess them some other time to the priest.

In this connexion, however, it should be borne in mind that we are not to examine our consciences too carelessly or indifferently, nor endeavour to recall our sins in such a negligent fashion as to seem as if we did not even wish to remember them. And should this have been the case, we must make the confession over again.

50.—The confession should be plain, simple, and sincere.

In the second place it should be attended to that our confession be plain, simple, and sincere—not artful or cunning as in the case of some who would seem to aim at justifying their life and conduct, rather than at confessing their sins. Our confession ought to be such as to reveal us to the priest just as we know ourselves to be, and to set forth as certain what is really certain, and as doubtful what is really doubtful. But if our sins are not enumerated, or if extraneous subjects are introduced, our confession manifestly does not possess this quality of which we speak.

51. — Confession should be prudent and modest.

Moreover, those are worthy of all praise who use discretion and modesty in explaining their sins ; too many words should be avoided ; and whatever is necessary to explain the nature and quality of each sin should be set forth modestly as well as briefly.

52.—Secrecy to be observed regarding confession.

In the fourth place, the utmost care should be taken both by penitent and priest that all that transpires in confession be kept a profound secret. Hence it is that no one is allowed to confess his sins either by messenger or letter, because in such case secrecy could no longer be strictly observed.

53.—Advantages of frequent confession.

The faithful should have nothing more at heart than to endeavour to purify their souls by frequent confession of their sins. When a man is loaded with any mortal sin, nothing can be more salutary to him, in view of the many dangers that threaten human life, than to confess his sins without delay. And even though we could promise ourselves a long life, yet it would be truly shameful that we who are so punctilious with regard to cleanliness of person or dress, should not be at least equally careful to prevent the beauty of our souls from being sullied by the hideous stains of sin.

XIII.—THE MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

54.—The minister of the sacrament of Penance must be a priest.

Coming now to speak of the minister of the sacrament of Penance who, as is clear from the Church's laws, must be a priest possessing either ordinary or delegated power of absolving, not only must he have the power of orders, but also that of jurisdiction. Of this ministry the words of our Lord in St. John afford a striking proof: *Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*[1]—words which were addressed not to all men but to the Apostles alone; and in this ministry the successors of the Apostles are the priests of the Church. This is but natural and fitting; for all the graces that are bestowed on us in this sacrament are derived from Christ the Head to us His members; and consequently they alone who have the power of consecrating the real body of Christ, ought to administer the graces flowing from Penance to His mystic body, the faithful, especially since it is by means of this sacrament of Penance that the faithful become qualified and disposed to receive the Blessed Eucharist.

The great care with which the right of the "ordinary" priest was guarded in the primitive Church is easily seen from the ancient decrees of the Fathers, which provided that no bishop or priest should dare to exercise any function in the parish of another without the authorization of him who governs that parish, except, when compelled by pressing necessity. This rule was sanctioned by the Apostle when he ordered Titus to *ordain priests in every city*,[1] to nourish and fortify the faithful with the heavenly food of doctrine and of the sacraments.

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[1] John xx. 23.

55.—In case of necessity any priest may absolve any sinner.

But when there is danger of death, and when recourse cannot be had to one's own pastor, the Council of Trent teaches that lest any soul should perish it has always been the practice of the Church to allow all priests, not only to remit all sorts of sins, no matter what the faculties required under other circumstances, but also to absolve from the bond of excommunication.

56. — Knowledge and prudence requisite in the minister.

Besides the powers of orders and of jurisdiction which are absolutely necessary in the minister, it is also highly important that he should be gifted with knowledge and prudence, since he holds at one and the same time the place of judge and physician. As a judge it is evident that no mere ordinary knowledge is required, whether to discover the penitent's sins or to decide which of the various sins revealed to him are grave and which light, according to each one's rank and condition. As physician he has need of the greatest prudence, since he must carefully see that to the invalid are administered those remedies that are best calculated to effect the cure of the soul's malady, and fortify it against the contagion of sin for the future.

From this the faithful will easily see the great care each one should take to select as confessor a priest who is commended by integrity of life, learning, prudence, and judgment, who is deeply conscious of the weight and responsibility of the office confided to him, who knows the punishments suitable to every sin, and can discern who are to be loosed and who bound.

57.—The seal of the confessional is inviolable.

But as there is no one who does not earnestly wish to see his sins and their turpitude buried in oblivion, it should be pointed out to the faithful that there is not the slightest reason for them to fear that anything they have made known in confession will ever be revealed by the priest, or that any danger whatever can ever happen to them in consequence of confession. The constitutions of the Church have sanctioned the severest penalties against those priests who will not bury in inviolable, eternal silence all the sins confessed to them. Thus, in the great Lateran Council, we read : " Let the priest take care never to betray the sinner in the slightest degree by word or sign, or by any other means whatever."

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[1] Titus i. 5.

XIV.—DUTIES OF THE PRIEST TOWARDS THE PENITENT

58.—To observe whether the penitent is really contrite.

Now that we have spoken of the minister, due order demands that we should turn to the explanation of certain special points which have no little bearing on the use and practice of confession. Many, to whom as a rule no time seems to pass so slowly as the days appointed by the law of the Church for confession, are so far removed from Christian perfection that they scarcely try to remember the sins which they are to make known to the priest, not to speak of diligently attending to all those other matters that are plainly of the greatest efficacy in conciliating divine grace and friendship. Hence since the priest should neglect nothing that contributes to the salvation of his flock, his first care should be to examine attentively whether the penitent has a true sorrow for his sins, and whether he has a fixed and firm resolution of avoiding sin for the future.

If he finds his penitent thus disposed, he should then earnestly advise and exhort him to return heartfelt thanks to God for this great and precious benefit, and never cease imploring the aid of divine grace, fortified and protected by which he will easily resist and curb his evil passions. He should also be taught to allow no day to pass without meditating for some time on one of the mysteries of the Passion, so as to inflame his heart with a burning desire of imitating and loving his Redeemer with ardent love. Meditating thus, he will every day feel himself grow stronger against all the assaults of the devil. Nor is there any other reason why, on being assailed by the devil, we lose courage and strength so readily and so easily than because we do not strive by meditating on heavenly things to enkindle within us the fire of that divine love which animates and invigorates the soul.

But should the priest perceive that he who is making a confession does not detest his sins in such a way that he can be regarded as truly contrite, he should endeavour to inspire him with an earnest longing for contrition, so that, inflamed by the desire of this precious gift, he may resolve to ask and implore it from the mercy of God.

59.—How to act in the case of those who seek to excuse their sins

Especially, however, should he repress the pride of those who seek to defend or extenuate their offences on the score of various excuses. For instance, a person confesses that he was violently moved by anger, but immediately goes on to ascribe the cause of his transport to another who, he complains, had previously done him some injury. Now, a penitent of this type should be reminded that such excuses are a sign of a proud spirit, and of a man who thinks lightly or is altogether ignorant of the gravity of his sin, and that they tend rather to aggravate than lessen his sin. For he who thus strives to justify his fault would seem as if he intended to assert that he will exercise patience only when offended or injured by no one—a frame of mind utterly unworthy of a Christian. In place of being deeply sorry, as he ought, for the state of him who inflicted the injury, he is unmoved by the heinousness of the sin itself, and is angry with his brother ; and though a precious occasion is offered him of honouring God by patience, and correcting his brother by mildness, he converts the very means of salvation into an occasion of his own ruin.

60.—And how towards those ashamed to confess their sins.

Still more baneful must be considered the fault of those who, restrained by a foolish feeling of shame, are afraid to confess their sins. They should be encouraged and exhorted ; and it should be represented to them that there is not the slightest reason for them to be afraid to disclose their sins, and that the fact that men fall into sin is no cause for surprise, since it is a malady common to the whole human race, and a natural consequence of human frailty.

Towards the negligent.

There are others who, either because they rarely confess their sins, or because they have taken no pains or thought to examine their consciences and discover their sins, hardly know how to tell their sins or where to begin. Persons such as these should certainly be severely rebuked, and especially should they be shown that before appearing in the presence of the priest, each one should do his best to excite himself to contrition for his sins, and that this can never be accomplished without endeavouring to remember and recognize them one by one.

Whenever the confessor, then, meets persons utterly unprepared like this, he should dismiss them in the gentlest terms, and exhort them to devote some time to reflecting on their sins and then return to confession. But if they declare they have used all the care and diligence in their power (for in such case it is greatly to be feared that if once sent away they will not return), their confession should be heard, especially if they manifest any desire of amending their lives, and if they can be induced to accuse themselves of their negligence and promise to make up for it another time by a diligent and accurate examination of conscience. Great caution, however, should be observed in such cases; for if, after having heard the confession, the priest considers that neither diligence in accusing his sins nor sorrow in detesting them is altogether wanting in the penitent, he can absolve him; but if he sees that both one and the other are absent, he will advise and exhort him, as already said, to use greater care in examining his conscience and, treating him in the kindest possible manner, will finally dismiss him unabsolved.

61. — And how towards those who are restrained by false modesty.

It sometimes happens that females who have forgotten some sin in a former confession cannot bring themselves to return to the priest, for fear of exposing themselves to the suspicion of being guilty of some serious sin, or of endeavouring to acquire a reputation for great piety. The pastor will, then, both publicly and privately explain that no one can have a memory so far reliable as to be able to remember all his acts, words, and thoughts; and that, consequently, should the faithful happen to remember some sin previously forgotten they should on no account be deterred from returning to the priest.

These, then, and many other points of a similar character, should be attended to by the priest in confession.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—(*continued*)

6. THE ACCUSATION OF SINS TO THE CONFESSOR

Q. Having prepared properly for confession by an examination of conscience, by exciting sorrow, and by forming a good resolution, what do you do next ?

A. Having prepared properly for confession by an examination of conscience, by sorrow, and by a purpose of amendment, I will go and make an accusation of my sins to the confessor in order to get absolution.

Q. What sins are we bound to confess ?

A. We are bound to confess all our mortal sins ; it is well, however, to confess our venial sins also.

Q. Which are the qualities the accusation of sins, or confession, ought to have ?

A. The principal qualities which the accusation of our sins ought to have are five : It ought to be *humble*, *entire*, *sincere*, *prudent*, and *brief*.

Q. What is meant by saying that the accusation ought to be *humble ?*

A. That the accusation ought to be *humble*, means that the penitent should accuse himself to his confessor without pride or boasting ; but with the feelings of one who is guilty, who confesses his guilt, and who appears before his judge.

Q. What is meant by saying that the accusation ought to be *entire ?*

A. That the accusation ought to be *entire* means that all mortal sins we are conscious of having committed since our last good confession must be made known, together with their circumstances and number.

Q. What circumstances must be made known for the accusation to be *entire ?*

A. For the accusation to be *entire*, the circumstances which change the species of the sin must be made known.

Q. Which are the circumstances which change the species of a sin ?

A. The circumstances which change the species of a sin are : (1) Those by which a sinful action from being venial becomes mortal ; (2) Those by means of which a sinful action contains the malice of two or more mortal sins.

Q. Give an example of a circumstance making a venial sin mortal.

A. If, to excuse himself, a man were to tell a lie and by doing so occasion serious harm to another, he would be bound to make known this circumstance, which changes the lie from an officious lie to a seriously harmful lie.

Q. Give an example of a circumstance on account of which a single sinful action contains the malice of two or more sins ?

A. If a man were to steal a sacred object he would be bound to accuse himself of this circumstance which adds to the theft the malice of sacrilege.

Q. If a penitent is not certain of having committed a sin must he confess it ?

A. If a penitent is not certain of having committed a sin he is not bound to confess it ; and if he does confess it, he should add that he is not certain of having committed it

Q. What should he do who does not remember the exact number of his sins ?

A. He who does not distinctly remember the number of his sins must mention the number as nearly as he can.

Q. Does he who through forgetfulness does not confess a mortal sin, or a necessary circumstance, make a good confession ?

A. He who through pure forgetfulness does not confess a mortal sin, or a necessary circumstance, makes a good confession, provided he has been duly diligent in trying to remember it.

Q. If a mortal sin, forgotten in confession, is afterwards remembered, are we bound to confess it in another confession ?

A. If a mortal sin forgotten in confession is afterwards remembered, we are certainly bound to confess it the next time we go to confession.

Q. What does he commit who through shame or some other motive wilfully conceals a mortal sin in confession ?

A. He who through shame or some other motive wilfully conceals a mortal sin in confession, profanes the sacrament and is consequently guilty of a very great sacrilege.

Q. In what way must he relieve his conscience who has wilfully concealed a mortal sin in confession?

A. He who has wilfully concealed a mortal sin in confession, must reveal to his confessor the sin concealed, say in how many confessions he has concealed it, and make all these confessions over again, from the last good confession.

Q. What reflection should a penitent make who is tempted to conceal a sin in confession ?

A. He who is tempted to conceal a mortal sin in confession should reflect :—

1. That he was not ashamed to sin in the presence of God who sees all ;

2. That it is better to manifest his sin secretly to the confessor than to live tormented by sin, die an unhappy death, and be covered with shame before the whole world on the day of general judgment ;

3. That the confessor is bound by the seal of confession under the gravest sin and under threat of the severest punishments both temporal and eternal.

Q. What is meant by saying that the accusation ought to be *sincere ?*

A. By saying that the accusation ought to be *sincere*, is meant that we must unfold our sins as they are, without excusing them, lessening them, or increasing them.

Q. What is meant by saying that the confession ought to be *prudent ?*

A. That the confession ought to be *prudent*, means that in confessing our sins we should use the most careful words possible and be on our guard against revealing the sins of others.

Q. What is meant by saying the confession ought to be *short ?*

A. That the confession ought to be short, means that we should say nothing that is useless for the purpose of confession.

Q. Is it not a heavy burden to be obliged to confess one's sins to another, especially when these are shameful sins ?

A. Although it may be a heavy burden to confess one's sins to another, still it must be done, because it is of divine precept, and because pardon can be obtained in no other way ; and, moreover, because the difficulty is compensated by many advantages and great consolations.

7. How to Make a Confession

Q. How do you present yourself to the confessor ?

A. I kneel at the feet of the confessor and I say: " Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

Q. What do you do while the confessor blesses you ?

A. I humbly bow my head to receive the blessing and I make the sign of the Cross.

Q. Having made the sign of the Cross what should you say ?

A. Having made the sign of the Cross, I say: "I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to all the Saints, and to you, my ghostly Father, that I have sinned."

Q. And then what must you say ?

A. Then I must say: " I was at confession such a time ; by the grace of God I received absolution, performed my penance, and went to Holy Communion." Then I accuse myself of my sins.

Q. When you have finished the accusation of your sins what do you do ?

A. When I have finished the accusation of my sins I say: "I accuse myself also of all the sins of my past life, especially of those against such or such a virtue"—for example, against purity or against the Fourth Commandment, etc.

Q. After this accusation what should you say ?

A. I should say: " For all these sins and for those I do not remember, I ask pardon of God with my whole heart, and penance and absolution of you, my ghostly Father."

Q. Having thus finished the accusation of your sins what remains to be done ?

A. Having finished the accusation of my sins I should listen respectfully to what the confessor says, accept the penance with a sincere intention of performing it ; and, from my heart, renew my act of contrition while he gives me absolution.

Q. Having received absolution what remains to be done ?

A. Having received absolution I should thank the Lord, perform my penance as soon as possible, and put in practice the advice of the confessor.

8. Absolution

Q. Must confessors always give absolution to those who go to confession to them ?

A. Confessors should give absolution to those only whom they judge properly disposed to receive it.

Q. May confessors sometimes defer or refuse absolution ?

A. Confessors not only may, but must defer or refuse absolution in certain cases so as not to profane the sacrament.

Q. Who are those penitents who are to be accounted badly disposed and to whom absolution must as a rule be refused or deferred ?

A. Penitents who are to be accounted badly disposed are chiefly the following :—

1. Those who do not know the principal mysteries of their faith, or who neglect to learn those other truths of Christian Doctrine which they are bound to know according to their state ;

2. Those who are gravely negligent in examining their conscience,

or who show no signs of sorrow or repentance;

3. Those who are able but not willing to restore the goods of others, or the reputations they have injured;

4. Those who do not from their heart forgive their enemies;

5. Those who will not practise the means necessary to correct their bad habits;

6. Those who will not abandon the proximate occasions of sin.

Q. Is not a confessor too severe, who defers absolution because he does not believe the penitent is well enough disposed?

A. A confessor who defers absolution because he does not believe the penitent well enough disposed, is not too severe; on the contrary, he is very charitable and acts as a good physician who tries all remedies, even those that are disagreeable and painful, to save the life of his patient.

Q. Should the sinner to whom absolution is deferred or refused, despair or leave off going to confession altogether?

A. A sinner to whom absolution is deferred or refused, should not despair or leave off going to confession altogether; he should, on the contrary, humble himself, acknowledge his deplorable state, profit by the good advice his confessor gives him, and thus put himself as soon as possible in a state deserving of absolution.

Q. What should a penitent do with regard to selecting a confessor?

A. A genuine penitent should earnestly recommend himself to God for help to enable him to select a pious, learned, and prudent confessor, into whose hands he should put himself, obeying him as his judge and physician.

Twenty-seventh Instruction on the Sacraments

NECESSITY, JUSTICE, AND ADVANTAGES OF CONFESSION

FOLLOWING the division which I have adopted from the beginning, which is based on the teaching of the Council of Trent, and which reduces the acts of the penitent to three—Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction—I have hitherto confined my attention to the first, that is contrition, which embraces two things: sorrow for the past, and purpose of amendment for the future.

It may seem to some that I have dwelt too long on this part ; but I cannot agree with this view. Much as I have said, I have certainly not said too much, for the great, the most common, and the most general defect of confession is the absence of the requisite disposition of contrition and purpose of amendment ; and from this defect springs every other abuse which is committed in the sacrament of Penance. We are often conscious of the need and obligation of confession, but at the same time we are not always conscious of the will to be converted ; we do not, it is true, wish to become guilty of a sacrilege, but neither do we wish to bind ourselves to a real change of life and conduct—and this is the reason why sinners commence their self-deception in their examination of conscience, only to end by deceiving the minister of God during the accusation of their sins. Now all this would be simply impossible if they had genuine contrition for their sins.

This is the reason why I have dwelt on the matter with so much insistence ; and if I could only flatter myself that I had succeeded, I should almost consider it useless to dwell on the other parts. These, however, must not be passed over in silence.

In its general and widest sense, the word confession comprises all that relates to the sacrament of Penance ; but in its strictest and truest sense it applies to the second part of the sacrament and consists in the accusation of our sins made to a priest who is authorized to judge and pardon them in virtue of the power conferred on him by Jesus Christ. Two points, consequently, present themselves for our consideration :—

1. Necessity, justice, and advantages of confession, and
2. The way to make it.

As to the first point, there is nothing that heretics, libertines, and bad Christians detest so much as confession, and hence it is that they do their best and have always done their best, to discredit and destroy it. They call it *a burthen, an intolerable slavery, a torture of consciences,* and *an invention of priestcraft.* You may possibly have heard statements like this: " What necessity is there to confess to a priest, relate one's weaknesses to him, and humiliate oneself before him? A practice such as this should be left to fools and simpletons." They speak thus to discredit and decry confession; but they only succeed in establishing the truth still more, the more they paint it in darker colours. For how is it possible that so humiliating a practice, as they describe it, and so mortifying to human pride, has been upheld and respected throughout the course of the centuries that have intervened between the time of our Lord and our own days, if it did not descend directly from Him, and if it had not its source and origin in the very origin of Christianity itself? And if, as they pretend, it has not Jesus Christ for its author, if it is a human invention, and far posterior to Him, it is for them to say in what epoch such a revolting novelty was introduced, and how it came to be introduced without opposition or outcry. But in vain are such questions asked —no reasonable answer is ever forthcoming.

Not alone that, but we on our part can point to the fact that we find its institution very clearly and evidently recounted in the Gospel. Distinct and formal are the words of Jesus Christ, which I have quoted on a former occasion, and from which all the Fathers and theologians establish the necessity of confession. After having in that mysterious breathing of His mouth communicated the Holy Spirit to His Apostles, He furthermore made them sharers in His divine authority, saying to them: *Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*[1]

From these memorable words, it follows:—

(i.) That priests really possess the power of remitting sins—a power which Jesus Christ also denoted under the material symbol of keys, a symbol which amongst the Hebrews signified a power, a conferred authority, and which furthermore denotes that no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven that has been closed against him by sin unless its gates shall have been first opened to him by the ministers of the Church.

(ii.) It follows, in the second place, that this power thus conferred on the priests of the Church must be exercised by them under the form of trial and judgment; for they are charged by Jesus Christ not only to loose but also to bind—*you shall forgive . . . you shall*

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[1] John xx. 23.

retain. Sin, then, must be distinguished from sin, and penitent from penitent, in the use of this divine authority, which use must be just and conformable to the intentions and designs of God, and not arbitrary or capricious. But how can the priest thus distinguish, unless he knows the penitent's sins in detail ? and how can he know them unless the penitent himself make them known accurately ? The priest has indeed received the power of remitting sins, but with it he has not received the power of seeing into the depths of the heart of man.

Thus, then, the necessity of confession is founded on the very nature of the sacrament which was instituted by Jesus Christ under the form of a trial ; in this trial the priest is the judge of consciences , and where is the judge who can pronounce sentence without knowing the case at issue ? To assert that Jesus Christ gave to His priests the power to absolve penitents blindly and indiscriminately without a knowledge of the state of their souls, is a downright absurdity directly opposed to the meaning of His words. We must, then, admit that by these words He has bound sinners to manifest their consciences to the priest to enable him to give a fair and just judgment in their cases. This reasoning is so clear, convincing, and decisive, that it can never be refuted or proved to possess the slightest flaw.

No matter, then, what your opinion of confession may be, no matter how hard and difficult it may seem, you must rest content with the knowledge that God commands it and that you are bound to obey. Except in the case in which it is impossible, confession is the one way to regain the grace of God—even though perfect contrition does justify us before confession, it can only produce this effect in so far as it is accompanied by the desire and the intention of going to confession as soon as possible. Now I ask : In case of grave illness when we find that there exists just one remedy, do we not seek to procure that remedy at all costs no matter how troublesome or distasteful it may be ? Why shall we not say the same of confession ?

But is it really true that this precept is as hard and burthensome as is sometimes asserted ? To speak of it and to characterize it thus, is to know but little of the grace which God gives us in pardoning the offences we have committed against Him. If we only knew this gift, and valued it as much as it deserves, instead of complaining of the precept of confession we should rather be filled with astonishment that a God infinitely great and infinitely outraged by His vile creatures should deign to restore them His grace on such light and mild conditions. What a miracle of goodness it is that it is enough for us sorrowfully to confess our guilt to the priest in order to receive pardon of our sins, no matter how numerous and enormous they may have been, and that in every place, and time, and occasion !

Tell me : is pardon thus easily obtained from men for the injuries done them ? How many are there who absolutely refuse to pardon those who have offended them ? How many there are who are barely induced to grant pardon by the force of prayers, and tears, and repeated supplications ? How many who, after having granted pardon, still preserve traces of the past coolness and disunion ? And should the offence be renewed, how many there are who lose all patience and give free vent to the promptings of revenge ? Not thus does God act towards us. He declares He is ever ready to forgive us our sins, no matter how grave, or repeated, or numerous they may be, and to pardon them in so perfect a manner that there remains in Him not the smallest shadow of aversion, or enmity, or remembrance of the sin that was, but only love and the prompt will to do us good. How different from earthly tribunals ! There, even penitent admission of guilt draws down on the guilty the punishment deserved, and hence it comes to pass that many criminals strongly and persistently deny their guilt ; but in the tribunal of Penance, confession is followed by pardon and grace. All the prisons on earth would be instantly emptied, if, to be freed, it sufficed for the prisoners to reveal their guilt to their judges. And yet, God demands simply this of us and nothing more.

Granted, then, that it is humiliating in the extreme to be obliged to disclose our conscience to the priest, and sometimes to reveal to him things that we should, if that were possible, hide from our very selves, yet, what proportion can there be between a fleeting moment of shame and the eternal punishment we have merited by our sins ? Could not God, without the least injustice, have obliged us to public and open confession ? could He not have attached to our pardon still harder conditions, such as scourging, fasting, extensive mortifications and penances ? And what condition could seem too hard, when it comes to a question of escaping eternal perdition ? What would not the malefactor condemned to death do to escape his fate ? How much more, then, do not we owe to God, for having offered us so easy a means of delivering ourselves from a death that is not merely temporal but eternal ?

To many Christians can be aptly applied the remonstrance made to Naaman, the minister of the King of Syria by his servants on his refusal to avail of the remedy suggested to him by the Prophet Eliseus, which was to bathe seven times in the Jordan, in order to heal the leprosy with which he was covered from head to foot. Master, they said to him in their zeal for his welfare, even if the Prophet had prescribed a difficult remedy, you should obey his directions, in order to deliver yourself from your malady ; and now that he prescribes so easy a remedy as that of merely bathing a few times in the Jordan, will you refuse to try it? *If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it: how much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash, and thou shalt be clean?*[1] Happily for himself he followed their advice, and was instantly healed. The same remark applies to those who display such great repugnance to the mystic Jordan of confession? If God had promised pardon of their sins, of that much more horrible leprosy, on still more strict and difficult conditions, they should even then obey at all costs in order to obtain that pardon; but while He asks nothing more than a sorrowful confession of these sins to His minister, what difficulty can there be in making use of the remedy He has prescribed? And all the more so, inasmuch as they can select their own judge, while in earthly tribunals one must appear before whatever judge has been appointed to try the case. In earthly tribunals, crimes and transgressions are made public property; while in the tribunal of Penance they remain buried in the most inviolable secrecy. And is not this consequently a tribunal of sweetness, clemency, and mildness?

In fine, what shall we say of the immense advantages of confession? Even had God not commanded it, the advantages derived from it should be always a sufficient motive to make us practise it. I do not here refer exactly to the effects which the sacrament produces in the soul of him who receives it—effects which display in a still stronger light the mercy of the Lord in this sacrament, as we shall see later on; but I refer to the many exterior advantages—advantages even of a temporal character—which it confers on society at large.

In the first place, which of us does not see in confession a great and powerful restraint against sin? It is precisely because our pride is necessarily deeply mortified at having to declare our most shameful and vilest sins that many refrain from sin. The repugnance experienced in disclosing them, the difficulty encountered in revealing them properly, the feelings of respect inspired by the sacred character of the priest, and the consequent fear of attracting his displeasure or reproaches, and of being awarded severe penances, or even of being denied absolution in the case of our having fallen into the same sins over and over again—all these motives exert a powerful influence over our self-love, and contribute with the help of God's grace to strengthen our resolutions and preserve us from sinning again.

Do you remember what happened in the fifteenth century when the heretics succeeded in abolishing confession in certain countries?

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[1] 4 Kings v. 13.

The fact is certain and incontrovertible—they very soon saw such a depravation of morals and such a torrent of scandal, corruption, and disorder that, filled with shame and horror, they themselves had recourse to the civil powers to restore confession; so true is it that confession is a powerful restraint against man's evil inclinations. Moreover, a single reflection suffices to show this—all those who wish to travel by the broad way and tread the paths of vice, always begin by abandoning confession, and they only return when, re-entering into themselves, they begin to turn their attention to leading a better life.

Another advantage of confession—an advantage comprising several other advantages—is that which arises from our submitting ourselves to another's guidance and direction. If in our most difficult temporal concerns, it is desirable for us to have a good guide, a wise adviser, or faithful friend, to console and comfort us, how much more will it not be the case in our spiritual concerns and in the path of salvation?

Now, such precisely are the advantages we derive from confession—from having in the minister of God, one to whom we can lay bare our souls, who points out our duty to us, who reveals to us the dangers that threaten us, who dissipates our errors, who clears up our doubts, who encourages and comforts us, and who, so to say, conducts us by the hand along the path that leads to heaven.

What advantages does not a good confessor procure, both for the good of the individual and of society at large! In order to regain and preserve the grace of God, certain souls must make great sacrifices, must renounce much that, though pleasant, is dangerous; must restore goods wrongly acquired, submit to making burthensome reparation, pardon the most atrocious injuries done them, and much more that is equally difficult. Now, all this is accomplished through the assistance of their confessor, who points out the proper means, who animates and sustains them, and inspires them with confidence and courage. And how are these results obtained? By a special grace which God accords His ministers in the direction of souls, and by an order established by God who, under ordinary circumstances, does not Himself directly sanctify souls, but does so by submitting them to the guidance of other men—and sometimes of men who have less lights, perfection, and virtue—under whose direction, nevertheless, have been formed canonized saints of the very highest order of piety and holiness.

Now, what saltuary effects are not produced and evidenced daily, by means of this same ministry? Dangerous occasions avoided, scandals repaired, restitution made, damages compensated, discord appeased, enmities extinguished, husband and wife re-united, families pacified, the succours of charity secretly held out to shrinking poverty, the unhappy of every kind encouraged under the weight of their tribulations, and turned aside from the evil designs to which despair might lead them, the erring and the wandering of all ages and conditions led back to duty and honour—in fine, crimes lessened and the number of the guilty reduced.

Who will deny that all this is a great and excellent advantage to individuals and to society ? Yet it is all the work—the secret work —of the confessional ; take away the confessional and not one of these effects remain. In this tribunal are judged not only deeds, but even thoughts, affections, and desires, and thus the evil is attacked at its roots—an effect never accomplished by human laws or human regulations which only consider the exterior, and do not reach the heart. The advantages, then, derived from confession are immense ; and these advantages reveal a particular trait of the wisdom and goodness of God in instituting this sacrament. Now, in the face of all this will you still have the courage to reject it or turn it into ridicule ?

But, you may say, why all these reflections in defence of confession ? Simply to inspire you with a just esteem for it, and to guard you against being influenced by the sarcasms and the jests you see coming from the lips of certain persons, who speak without knowing what they say, and who pour out ridicule over things the holiest and most venerable. In consideration of the tendency to unrestricted thought and language that prevails everywhere in these days, when I come to explain certain truths of our religion I can no longer confine myself to doing so as a simple catechist, but am sometimes obliged to enter on the domain of controversy and defend or support truths, dogmas, and practices, which are specially attacked and ridiculed by libertines. In the case in question my purpose has been to fortify you against the ideas of those libertines who, having themselves strayed from the right path, would wish also to see others stray along with them, and with a view to this rob them of the only means of salvation—confession.

In addition to what has been already said there are two other considerations which should deprive their sarcasm and ridicule of all force and value :—

1. The first is the character of their life and conduct. If all those who ridicule and laugh at confession were persons of even natural upright life, integrity and honesty, their words could have some weight ; but as their conduct, on being examined, proves them to be for the most part men who show no more signs of religion or worship than Mohammedans or pagans, men who are abandoned to the most infamous

vices, and especially to sensual pleasures; men who are capable of every kind of fraud, injustice, and deceit; it is consequently easy to understand the reason of their hatred of confession—a hatred that springs from a depraved heart, and from corrupt and immoral conduct.

2. A second and still more striking consideration is the last scene of their lives. After having, during life, mocked and ridiculed confession, is it not true that the greater part of them, on feeling themselves seriously ill, and on beholding the near approach of death, cease to mock confession and confessors, and do not think it beneath them to call in the priest, and lay bare to him their sins. How very like cowardice is this? or rather how cowardly is their action during life and health in ridiculing and despising the sacrament that whether they like it or not could not but dwell in their mind as their one hope in the hour of death! Assuredly their conduct cannot escape being characterized as cowardly in one sense or in the other—if not in life, then at the hour of death; if not in the hour of death, then during life.

This change of principle and of action, in that great moment of truth and light, is the strongest refutation of all their statements and assertions. But it is time to conclude.

Let us ever preserve the greatest respect for this sacrament which God Himself has instituted, and made indispensably necessary—a sacrament full of mercy and pardon, and consequently holy and salutary in every respect.

Twenty-eighth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

CONFESSION as prescribed by Jesus Christ is not any sort of confession at all, but a clear, precise, and detailed confession, conformably to what has been laid down in previous instructions. But it is impossible for it to have the requisite qualities, if it is not preceded by a proper examination of conscience. This examination is not, strictly speaking, one of the parts of the sacrament ; but it is an indispensable preparation for its reception—the penitent cannot accurately make known the state of his soul to the confessor without first knowing it himself ; and he cannot know it without a previous careful examination of conscience. Accordingly, we shall now speak of examination of conscience before proceeding to enter directly on the subject of confession itself.

Examination of conscience is a diligent investigation of one's sins, that is to say, of every word, deed, thought, or omission contrary to the law of God. This investigation must be diligent, according to the expression of the Council of Trent ; but it should not be excessive, nor should it be carried so far as to disturb or torment the conscience. There are, then, two extremes to be avoided—excessive care and anxiety on the one hand, and carelessness and negligence on the other.

1. Incredible though it may seem, those sometimes fall into the former defect whose consciences are far from tender in other respects, and who show themselves delicate and scrupulous on this point alone. I allude to those who, though leading a bad life and deriving no fruit from their confessions, yet when preparing to go to confession can never satisfy themselves in their examination of conscience,—their only fear is that they may forget some of their sins ; and when they have succeeded in arranging a long list of them in their minds, they then imagine they are perfectly prepared for confession—they lightly pass over all that regards contrition and purpose of amendment which in their case are usually acts of ineffectual and fleeting contrition and half-formed intention rather than acts of sincere sorrow and resolute will. Now, such persons as these are simply hypocrites who make all consist in the manifestation of their sins, and lose sight of the spirit of penance which is the first and principal object of the sacrament. Even though the extraordinary diligence displayed by

them in discovering their faults were demanded by God, it would simply be labour thrown away as long as the requisite dispositions are absent. Without contrition, as I have already pointed out, the most minute examination of conscience and the most detailed declaration of sins are completely useless.

It is important to bear this in mind, especially in the case of general confessions. Thus you will find some who, following the advice of the confessor who knows their state of soul, decide on making a general confession; but all intent on the examination of their sins, and paying little or no attention to contrition, they only succeed in tormenting themselves fruitlessly and in wearying the confessor with a long and endless account of their faults. Let all such learn that the involuntary omission of a sin or two is never an obstacle to grace, while defective contrition is so always.

But those who most frequently fall into the defect in question are persons of timorous conscience, who, no matter how much time they devote to it, are never satisfied with their examination; who never believe they have examined their consciences sufficiently; who by their own fears, render confession burthensome and almost insupportable, and who, instead of finding peace of soul, derive thence only trouble and anguish. Why thus torture the brain and the spirit? God, who is justice itself, does not oblige us to confess absolutely all our sins without any exception, but only those we are able to call to mind after a sufficient, reasonable, and methodical examination. If, after having used diligence such as this, you should happen to forget some sin it will be remitted the same as the sins that are mentioned, the only obligation remaining being that of accusing it in another confession, in case you happen to remember it later on.

Moreover, as persons such as these have as a rule only venial sins to confess they should bear in mind that the diligence that is required regards mortal sins alone, because mortal sins alone are the necessary matter, while venial sins are merely the sufficient matter of confession. It is indeed highly laudable to bear our venial sins in mind and mention them in confession, especially those that are more grave and deliberate; but it is neither necessary nor advisable to be over anxious about them or to waste that time which would be better and more usefully employed in forming acts of contrition. Nay, it is a snare of the devil; he fills you with anxiety and fear concerning your examination, in order that, being completely occupied in discovering your faults, you will neglect the important acts of contrition and purpose of amendment, without which you cannot obtain the pardon of any sin, either mortal or venial.

2. Much more common is the opposite defect of carelessness

and negligence into which those fall who stand in the greatest need of applying themselves seriously to the examination of conscience. Persons such as these will remain away from confession for months and years, living in dissipation, and leading a life full of all sorts of sin; yet when about to go to confession they merely glance superficially and vaguely at the past, and in a general kind of way call to mind some of the more memorable of their sins; like a hurried traveller who, from the summit of a mountain casts a rapid glance at the vast plain beneath and is barely able to discover the principal points or objects, without recognizing anything in detail. The result of an examination such as this is that the sins forgotten are more numerous than those remembered; and hence follows a very confused and unmethodical confession, with no precise declaration of either the number, or species, or circumstances of their sins. Now, confessions which are not preceded by a proper examination are very doubtful—for the forgetfulness that is due to neglect or carelessness is voluntary and inexcusable.

And under these circumstances what does it avail that you accuse yourself with sincerity, and that you do not conceal anything through shame or malice? It is always true that you only confess the half of your sins, that your confession is incomplete, defective, imperfect, simply because of a careless and hurried examination of conscience? The defects that arise are consequently to be attributed to your own fault since the cause that leads to them is voluntary on your part.

I know well that some try to excuse themselves on the plea of the skill of their confessor, who will help them by opportune questions. "My confessor," they say, "knows my conscience, and in his zeal and charity asks several questions which make up for all defects in my own examination." That may be all very true; yet I cannot admit the force of the excuse. Each must do his own part—the confessor as well as the penitent. Doubtless the confessor must try to make up for the incapacity or ignorance of the penitent, and do all he can to secure the integrity of confession; but this does not dispense you from your duty—it even presupposes you have already seen to it.

No matter how much the confessor questions you he can never divine all the kinds of sin you may have committed; and even if he should does there not still remain the obligation of declaring the number of the sins committed? Now, what help can you expect from the confessor who can learn only from yourself and from no one else how often you have committed these sins? And not being prepared by previous examination of conscience how can you reply with anything like accuracy? You do not wish to delay the confessor, and hence you answer at hazard, equally ready to say yes to whatever number—be it greater or less—that is suggested by him. In the same way if he asks an unexpected question, you become confused and, to avoid keeping him waiting, you answer yes or no, according as chance directs. Now, how can a confession of this kind avoid falling notably short of the integrity that is requisite ?

Devote, therefore, to your examination of conscience, proper attention and sufficient time. How much time ? No uniform rule can be laid down. All depends on two circumstances—the length of time since last confession, and the sort of life led in the meanwhile.

1. The length of the interval that has elapsed since last confession. Generally speaking, more time is required in the case of those who rarely go to confession, than in the case of those who go frequently. A person who does not wish to live in mortal sin, and who, if he does fall into sin does not wait to fall again before going to confession, needs contrition and purpose of amendment, but not examination of conscience, because the latter is supplied by the former. He who lives habitually in the state of grace and frequents the sacraments regularly needs only a single glance—a few seconds—to examine his conscience sufficiently.

2. But even supposing the same interval between one confession and another, account must also be taken of the sort of life led by the penitent. Thus, some live a life of dissipation and commit more sins in a day than others do in a week, or even in a month. Now, to re-enter into themselves and recall their sins to mind, persons of this class need considerable application, because they have to pass in review a number of things not easily seen at a glance.

The judicious rule laid down by the Roman Catechism is to devote to the examination of conscience the same care and diligence as prudent persons devote to important matters of business. If, for instance, you have an account to settle with some debtor, with what care do you not proceed in order that nothing be forgotten ! If you have a lawsuit pending, with what attention do you not scrutinize the documents and the pleas ! If you have to render account of some office with which you were charged, how careful would you not be to pass all in review ! This, then, is the rule to be followed in case of the most important matter of all—the affair of your eternal salvation —which is accomplished by means of a good and holy confession.

But quite an opposite rule is often followed in practice. When some temporal interest is concerned we spare neither time nor care, nor trouble—we pass entire days turning over in our minds all that concerns our interests. But when the interest concerned is that of our conscience and the account to be rendered to God, it is a matter of a moment—a mere superficial glance and all is finished.

It is also worthy of remark that some persons often omit confession because, they say, they find no sins to accuse themselves of, unless a considerable time is allowed to elapse between one confession and another. Happy they! provided their story is true. I willingly grant it can happen that after confession some time may pass in innocence, or at least without the commission of grave faults, as a result of the spiritual strength conferred by the sacrament; but as this strength decreases, they gradually fall back again into their accustomed sins, and hence the proper conclusion would be not to wait for grave faults before returning to confession, but, on the contrary to return again and again in order to anticipate these faults and never have any mortal sin to confess.

The real truth is, that it would seem much more probable that the greater part of those who speak thus, do not know what to confess because they have only too much to confess, and it is their very abundance that renders them poor.

And who are they who speak thus? Persons who have only a faint idea of their duties and obligations, who make little account of anything except their graver and grosser sins, who measure their faults, not according to the law of God, but according to the maxims of the world, who even consider the greatest disorders to be merely scruples and prejudices—persons, in fine, who as a result of the habitual dissipation in which they live, are no longer sensible to the wounds they daily inflict on their consciences. In these circumstances I easily understand how it is that no matter can be found for accusation and confession; but how many more sins would they have to accuse themselves of, if they were better enlightened as to their duties, better instructed as to their obligations and as to the law of God, and more vigilant as to their life and conduct? In a word, let such persons as these contrast themselves with those of known virtue and good conduct, and they will find their own pretended innocence vanish.

What leads me to conclude that in our examinations of conscience there is much negligence, levity, and bad faith, is the fact that when the Lord on some special occasion touches our hearts closely, and inspires us with a sincere resolution of changing our lives and making them truly Christian and thus avoid being surprised by death in a state of sin, there is hardly any who does not feel bound to make a general confession; and in this confession how many sins do they accuse themselves of which they had never mentioned in any previous confession! How many new sins come to light which were hitherto buried and forgotten in the innermost recesses of their conscience!

What proves this still more is the very different judgment we pass on our lives when we find ourselves in danger of death. Under what a different aspect does not everything then appear! What faults do we not then perceive which were never noticed before! How many sins come forth on every side which were previously ignored, dissimulated, excused, or concealed! It is evident, then, that our examinations of conscience are accompanied by negligence and want of due sincerity; and for the most part are nothing more than a confused and hasty review of a conscience which for years and years has never been thoroughly examined, and in which consequently lie hidden a thousand grave disorders to which memory would quickly become alive if we only were to make that serious and methodical examination of conscience that is required for the sacrament of Penance.

Let us reflect well on this, and let us endeavour to forestall tardy and useless remorse, by making a serious and attentive examination of conscience now—an examination which will remove the veil from our eyes, and like a faithful mirror will represent us to ourselves such as we really are and not such as our self-love would paint us.

Let us take as a model that examination which God will make of our lives when we have passed the portals of death. He will subject to a rigorous scrutiny not only our bad deeds, but even our words, thoughts, pleasures, desires, intentions, projects—in a word, all the evil we have done, and all the good we have omitted to do or have done badly. Nothing will escape His divine eye, and there will be no sin the malice of which will not be revealed before Him in all its fullness, and with all its circumstances. Now, this is exactly how we ought to judge ourselves if we wish to avoid the severity and rigour of the judgments of God: *If we would judge ourselves*, says St. Paul, *we should not be judged.*[1]

These last words contain a summary of all the matter which our examination should embrace when we are preparing for the sacrament of Penance; but it is highly important to set forth this matter in detail, and this I propose to do in our next instruction.

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[1] Cor. xi. 31.

Twenty-ninth Instruction on the Sacraments

MATTER OF THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Having in our last instruction clearly explained the attention and care with which the examination of conscience should be carried out, it now remains to point out exactly what it is on which we are to examine our conscience.

As the necessity of such examination is founded on the necessity of confession, it follows that it must necessarily embrace all that forms the necessary matter of confession. Now, the necessary matter of confession comprises all our mortal sins that have never been confessed, or have been badly confessed, or have been confessed but not pardoned owing to defective contrition; and not merely in a general way, but in detail—with their species, number, and certain special circumstances.

Let us first of all glance at our past confessions; for our examination must commence, not simply from our last confession, but from our last good confession. Many there are who take no thought of their past confessions, even though they have good reason to be doubtful about them; and yet it is of the utmost importance to be well assured on this point, for how can you hope before God to heal your recent wounds while your old wounds for one reason or another are still open? If good faith does not excuse you, and this is difficult, you will only add sacrilege to sacrilege.

Having now carefully and prudently satisfied yourself on the score of your past confessions, you should next see in what you have gravely offended God since your last confession. I say *gravely*, for as far as venial sins are concerned, they are not the necessary matter of confession. We shall accordingly confine our attention just now to mortal sin.

Now God can be offended gravely in four ways—by *thought word*, *deed*, or *omission*, and accordingly your examination must embrace these four heads, taking care, however, to dwell at greater length on those sins that are more easily forgotten. Thus, sins of *deed*, such as adultery, fornication, theft, quarrelling, murder, drunkenness, and so on, leave a profound impression on the mind, and easily recur to the memory. Not so in the case of those interior sins which are committed quickly and instantaneously, either against God or against our neighbour, such for instance, as doubts against faith, impure thoughts and desires, rash judgments, hatred, envy, aversion, and evil intentions or designs.

Such sins, which we call sins of *thought*, are more easily committed, and are remembered with greater difficulty; for an evil thought, affection, or inclination comes, goes, returns and vanishes in an instant, and provided there are reflection and consent, an instant is sufficient to be guilty of sin.

It is, therefore, necessary to attend carefully to the examination of sins of thought in order to discover their malice and number; and no one should dream of imagining that it is enough to say in a general sort of way: "I have had bad thoughts,"—it will be furthermore necessary to say whether you have consented to them, and if so, what was their nature.

It is no sin to have bad thoughts—no matter how abominable and vile they are, and no matter how long they may have troubled your mind, they can never stain the soul with guilt so long as they are not dwelt on knowingly and deliberately—of our own free will. Hence, in such a case there is no need of accusation or examination. But if they have been voluntarily entertained and consented to, they must be expressly and accurately noted in the examination of conscience, even though they were of short duration, even though followed by no action, even though retracted immediately after consent; for subsequently to retract does not do away with the fact that consent has been given to them. It is a peculiar and surprising fact that God-fearing souls are always disturbed in reference to these thoughts, and the fear of having consented to them fills them with anxiety, while unregulated and dissipated souls never suffer from any such scruples—they are, on the contrary, always ready to decide in their own favour, and to regard themselves as perfectly guiltless on this head.

The sins of the tongue are much more easily recognized than sins of thought; yet they also easily escape the memory. People talk the whole day long, and they often speak unthinkingly and unmeaningly. And hence, how many words injurious to God and to one's neighbour escape the lips daily!—blasphemy, perjury, malediction, imprecations, insults, threats, lies, false testimonies, murmurings, calumnies, obscene and impious discourses, and so on. An attentive and accurate examination should, then, be made on this point also, especially by those who are accustomed to use immoderate or unreserved language, and who say out everything that comes into their heads. Yet, as a rule, these persons confine themselves to declaring in confession that they have spoken badly, and nothing more.

This is not enough; you must also explain in what way—whether it was against religion, or purity, or charity; in the matter of uncharitable conversation, you must state whether what you said is true or false, serious or trifling; in the matter of impure language, you must state whether you have given scandal to others, and if so, to how many; as also the aim and intention of such conversations. It is altogether necessary to enter on these explanations; and this you cannot do without a previous careful examination of conscience.

Another point which is generally neglected, but which deserves all our attention is that regarding sins of omission by which we understand all the duties or obligations we have culpably omitted.

We are all bound by certain obligations both of a general and special character. As Christians we are bound by general obligations arising from the commandments of God and of the Church, such, for instance, as prayer, the keeping of oaths and vows, the sanctification of Sundays and festivals, fast, abstinence, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The special obligations that bind us are those arising from our particular state in life, such, for instance, as that of master or servant, parent or child, husband or wife; or from the particular positions we occupy, such, for instance, as that of shopkeeper, judge, lawyer, doctor, and so on.

The non-fulfilment of these duties is called a sin of *omission*, a sin that is far from rare—for the one deed done which should not be done, there are a hundred we ought to do, and which we do not do; a sin, moreover, which many persons do not scruple to commit precisely because, unlike sins of deed, it does not consist in any positive act but is purely negative—is, that is to say, the neglect to perform an action that should be performed. Now, persons of this class should bear in mind (1) that this action, though negative, always presupposes a positive act of the will deciding to omit to do what one is bound to do; (2) that this negative act can sometimes be much more grave in itself and in its consequences than a sin of commission or action, and that it certainly suffices of itself to make us incur the enmity of God and eternal damnation. The law of God is violated just as readily in omitting to do what it commands as in doing what it forbids: *Decline from evil and do good,*[1] are the two cardinal maxims of Christian life. Hence it is that in the Gospel there is no distinction made between the bad and the useless servant—between the tree that produced no fruit at all, and the tree that produced bad fruit.

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[1] Ps. xxxvi. 27.

This being the case, is it not clearly necessary to make a serious investigation into all the failings that may have been committed on this head, and especially on the duties of each one's state in life which have been most neglected? The ordinary confession, as a rule, only reveals sins common to all classes of persons; you hardly ever hear any reference to the special obligations of the penitent's state in life, so much so that it is difficult to divine from his confession what the penitent's condition or occupation may be. Meanwhile what becomes of our many personal transgressions—transgressions that are often neither few nor unattended by serious consequences? It is related of the Emperor Charles V, that he went to confession one day to a good and holy priest whom he happened to meet by chance; the priest having heard his confession was courageous enough to say to him. 'Thus far your Majesty has confessed the sins of Charles: let me now hear the sins of the Emperor"—that is to say, the sins committed in connexion with his position as ruler of his empire. The same remark applies to the case of many penitents whose confessions deal only with generalities and leave their personal obligations altogether untouched. The head of a house, for instance, should render an account of the training of his children and of the way he treats his wife and servants; servants of the care and attention they devote to their master's affairs; business people of their dealings; lawyers of the cases entrusted to their care; physicians of their attention to their patients. Is it not true that each one must render to God an account of all this? And if so, why do we not question ourselves on this point when preparing for confession? Why close our eyes and pretend not to see? Even if we are ignorant of our obligations, our ignorance does not excuse us; but if we know them and make no effort to examine our conscience in reference to this point, it is worse still. Let us, then, examine our conscience, and let us be careful to examine it on the duties of our state so as to see how we are discharging them.

I mentioned that in our examination of conscience we must also pay attention to the species and number of our sins, and to the circumstances that change the species.

The difference of sin from sin is based on the fact that they are contrary either to different precepts—the precept not to tell lies, for example, is different from that forbidding us to blaspheme; or to different virtues, as, for instance, religion, justice, temperance, chastity; or to different aspects of the same virtue. Thus, when you offend your neighbour in his life, or in his honour, or in his property, you do indeed sin against justice; but these three offences form three sins of different species; and hence it would not be enough to accuse yourself of having sinned grievously against justice; but you should also explain in which of the three classes you have been wanting. The same applies to charity—we can sin against it by not correcting our neighbour, by refusing him alms in certain circumstances, by giving him scandal, by injuring him, by despising him; but all these are sins against different duties, and hence it is not enough to say simply "I have sinned against charity." This, then, is what is meant by the species of sin.

We must also distinguish the number of mortal sins committed under each species—it is not the same thing to blaspheme once and to blaspheme a hundred times. What sort of confession is that made by those who accuse themselves of many grave sins without once mentioning the number of them, and thus the confessor is compelled to repeat every moment: "How many times?" And even then, instead of hearing the exact number, the confessor gets the reply: "Many times; several times"—vague expressions which can apply to widely different numbers.

But how can we be sure about the exact number, especially when the confession is long? God does not expect impossibilities—tell the precise number if you can; if you cannot then go as near as you can to it, saying, "About so many times more or less." And if you cannot even do this, then say how many times a week, or month, you have committed each sin.

It is not so difficult to determine the number in the case of external sins of word, deed, or omission—the greatest difficulty arises with respect to interior sins, such, for instance, as hatred, impurity and others of a similar character, when they have continued a long time. With regard to these, it is necessary to bear in mind that there are as many distinct sins as there are bad thoughts or affections voluntarily consented to and morally separated from one another, either by first repenting of a previous bad thought and then resuming it again, or by the intervention of some other thought which allows an interval to pass before you return to it. Each thought separated in either of these ways from the thoughts that preceded it, and the thought that follow it constitutes a new and distinct sin—a principle to be kept clearly before the mind when endeavouring to determine the number of such sins as nearly as possible.

Finally, it is necessary to make known the circumstances of place, person, means, or intention, accompanying each sin, and changing its species. For some circumstances give a new malice to sin and change its species, as happens when a sin which of itself is contrary to one commandment or virtue is brought into conflict with another commandment or virtue in consequence of the place in which it has been committed, or of the person who commits it or with whom it is committed, or of the means employed to commit, or of the intention with which it is committed. Thus, should a church have been robbed, the thief must indicate this circumstance—which is a circumstance of place—for while of itself robbery is a sin because contrary to the Seventh Commandment; the fact that it has taken place in and from a church renders it also sacrilegious and contrary to the First Commandment, and hence it is a circumstance changing the nature of the original sin of theft. In the same way it is not enough for a person who has struck a priest to say simply that he struck someone, but he must also state that it was a priest he struck; and the reason is that while it is in itself a sin against the Fifth Commandment to use violence against any person, the sacred character of the priest gives an additional malice to the action of the person who strikes him, and thus makes that action contrary to the First Commandment also.

These, then, are the principal points on which our examination of conscience should be conducted; and I leave you to judge whether it is a matter that can be gone through in an instant, especially if it is a long time since last confession and if the penitent has been addicted to sin all the time.

Now what are we to do to ensure that our examination of conscience is properly made? Simply this: Before all we stand in need of the light of the Holy Spirit to enable us to know our sins, and this light can only be obtained from God. The first step, then, in preparing for confession is earnestly to beg Him to dispel the darkness of our intellect—a darkness that is all the more dense in proportion to the gravity of our sins and the frequency with which we are accustomed to commit them. Let us cry out with the blind man in the Gospel: *Lord that I may see*—Lord dispel the blindness and darkness of my intellect, open my eyes in order that I may clearly see the wounds of my soul: *Oh, my God, enlighten my darkness.*[1]

Aided by these lights which God will never refuse to give us if we only ask Him, let us then enter into ourselves, into all the corners and recesses of our conscience, as the Council of Trent directs, in evident allusion to the Gospel parable of the woman who, having lost the groat, lights a lamp, and with this lamp in hand examines all the corners of the house, and its most hidden recesses, removes all the furniture, and simply turns the house upside down: *She lights a candle, and sweeps the house, and seeks diligently until she finds the groat.*[2] And, then, leaving the house, she retraces all the steps she has made—churches, shops, streets, squares,—examining every step with minute attention. Let us also, first of all, enter into ourselves, let us carefully examine the recesses of our heart, let us then review in spirit the places we have frequented, the persons in whose company we have been, the occupations in which we have been engaged; let us go over the commandments of God and of the Church, the seven deadly sins, and the duties of our state in life, and let us judge ourselves impartially and dispassionately in reference to all these, according to the maxims of the Gospel and not according to the prejudices of the world. Acting otherwise we shall look for sins where there are none to be found, or we shall waste our time over trifling details, closing our eyes at the same time to graver and more palpable defects.

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[1] Ps. xvii. 29.

[2] Luke xv. 8.

Not only this, but we should examine ourselves with particular care in reference to those things we are anxious to pass over for fear of discovering something we should not be willing to avoid or correct, on the false pretext that we have nothing wrong to find. This is a bad sign—a sign that there really is something wrong; and hence we should examine ourselves more carefully on certain acquisitions and profits, certain affections or inclinations towards persons of the other sex, certain antipathies, aversions, and severities towards our neighbour, certain biting and bitter words, and finally on all the grave omissions of the duties of our state. All these things that trouble us, and which we should like to pass over in silence, ought to form the principal object of our examination. Such is the method to follow, if we wish to avoid remorse on the examination which God requires of us.

Finally, do you desire to know the great means to avoid being distressed by this examination? It is to examine ourselves frequently even when we have no idea of going to confession, and especially each evening before retiring to rest. If you reflect on yourselves and your conduct only at the moment of confession, it will be much more difficult for you to make the examination; but if you have formed the good habit of examining yourselves often, you shall experience little difficulty in discovering your sins when about to confess them.

Repeated self-examination is strongly recommended by all the Fathers and masters of the spiritual life, as the most powerful means not only of facilitating confession, but of preserving from sin. And who, in fact, are they who most readily fall into debt? Precisely those who never pay attention to their accounts and daily expenses. It is the same in matters of the soul. Sins are multiplied without measure, when they are never glanced at or examined; but if, on the contrary, we are careful to examine our conscience frequently, and count up our losses and daily faults, it will not be difficult for us to recognize our sins when we come to confession. And, what is still more important, we shall find in these repeated examinations a powerful inducement to lead a good life, and avoid loading ourselves with debt in the sight of God.

Thirtieth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE INTEGRITY OF CONFESSION AND THE VARIOUS WAYS IT IS VITIATED

AFTER having spoken of the examination of conscience which must precede confession, I now come to speak of confession itself and of the qualities it must possess.

Confession is a declaration, an accusation, of our sins made to an approved priest in order to obtain absolution of them. Theologians lay down several qualities and conditions that should accompany confession, but all are not equally necessary and important—some concern the decorum due to the sacrament while others regard its validity. Let us commence with the latter class which may be reduced to two qualities—*integrity* and *humility.*

The integrity of confession consists in distinctly telling all the mortal sins we are conscious of having committed in thought, word, deed, or omission, at the same time indicating candidly and simply their species, their number, and the circumstances changing their species. Having explained all these points in recent instructions, let us now see the various ways by which we may culpably fail in this quality. These ways are chiefly four : Forgetfulness, Ignorance, Shame, and Malicious Concealment.

1. By *forgetfulness.* Some penitents omit many sins because they do not remember them at the actual moment of confession. Now is this forgetfulness a valid excuse ? Not always, according to the principles laid down on a former occasion. For it may be either voluntary or involuntary—involuntary when preceded by a sufficient examination ; voluntary when it is due to negligence or the absence of the requisite diligence and care. Now the former does not invalidate the confession ; but the latter certainly does. Doubtless those who thus omit their sins would declare them if they remembered them ; but when their forgetfulness is due to a hasty and hurried examination, and to the imperfect attention devoted to the discovery of their sins, the omission is, if not directly, at least indirectly voluntary.

From this you will infer that those who live for long periods in forgetfulness of God and of their souls have good reason to doubt the integrity of their confession, if their examination of conscience has been made in a superficial manner.

2. By *ignorance.* Many are the sins that are not told because they are not recognized or regarded as sins. Now, does this ignorance excuse? Here also we must distinguish between two sorts of ignorance—that which is culpable from that which is not. Ignorance is not culpable when in spite of the care one takes to be instructed in his duties he is ignorant that such and such an act is sinful. Now, as such ignorance is accompanied by good faith, and as good faith excuses from sin, the confession consequently is not vitiated.

But ignorance is culpable when we knowingly neglect to use the means necessary for our instruction. How many there are who live in the grossest ignorance of the divine law and of most essential duties of a Christian; who are unaware of the many and grave transgressions they are guilty of each day, and of the many and serious transgressions of the duties of their state? What profound ignorance prevails with regard to a thousand different and essential points—such as property, contracts, buying and selling, ill-will, friendship, and so on! Now, this abuse would not exist if they displayed greater care and zeal in assisting at instructions in Christian doctrine. Their ignorance therefore, is culpable, and may render their confessions null and sacrilegious, unless in the case in which when preparing for confession they retract their ignorance by sincerely repenting of it, and by firmly resolving to labour carefully for the future to acquire sufficient knowledge of their duties and obligations.

3. By *shame.* I here refer to those who, when they have fallen into some grave sin, especially that against purity, are so overcome by shame in confession, that they do not dare to confess their sin, are purposely silent about it, and accuse themselves of all their sins except that one sin. This happens, principally in the case of young persons who by reason of their age are naturally timid and bashful.

Now, it is not necessary to waste words in proving that such a confession is sacrilegious. No matter what repugnance you may experience in confessing your sins, that is no excuse for dispensing yourself from the requisite integrity—nay, God has even ordained that this shame should serve in expiation of the sin committed, and as a restraint against falling into that sin again. In concealing this sin, therefore, you disobey the law of God in a grave matter; you tell a formal and positive lie in the very tribunal of truth; and you render yourself guilty of downright profanation and of a real sacrilege.

I do not think I can do better here than to direct this instruction towards inspiring you with horror of this enormous abuse and encouraging you to avow your sin frankly, if you should have had the misfortune to find yourself in that condition. In our next instruction I shall accordingly speak of the various ways in which the integrity of confession is vitiated by malicious concealment.

First of all, it should be noted that one of the devil's cleverest schemes consists in rendering you fearless and prompt to sin, but fearful and ashamed to confess your sin. He removes your shame when he tempts you to do evil, but restores it when you are about to declare that sin to the priest. But if you are not ashamed to commit it, why be ashamed to confess it ? If you were not ashamed to stain your soul, why be ashamed to purify it by a sincere confession ? Oh ! you will say, how is it possible not to be ashamed to manifest certain mysteries of iniquity, certain disgusting and abominable mysteries ! I answer that I do not intend to diminish or remove this shame. Only too many are met with who have no more shame in confessing the filthiest and most abominable sins than they had in committing them—bold and shameless souls, who display only too clearly how little account they make of their sins. It is not, then, my intention to deprive you of all shame when you are about to go to confession ; but this shame should not tie your tongue and close your lips so as to prevent you from declaring your faults. Be ashamed, says St. Bernard, but at the same time reveal all to the confessor ; and convert the shame you may feel into a means of satisfying for your sins—offer it to the justice of God in payment of your boldness in offending Him.

Nevertheless, I beg of you to reflect seriously on two things : The first is, that the shame in question is not as great as you imagine ; the second is that even if it were really so, it must at all costs be surmounted if you do not wish to lose your soul.

And first of all, tell me to whom and to how many are you obliged to discover your faults ? Is it before a crowded assembly, in a public square, or in a church full of people ? If this were the case I should truly have compassion for you ; but it is quite otherwise. It is enough for the Lord if you declare your sin to a single man—to a man strictly bound to preserve your secret—a man who, precisely because he is a man, is exposed to the same weaknesses—a man who is neither your superior nor your master, nor any other person in authority over you, but a simple priest, no matter who, provided he is approved, whom you are at liberty to select at will, and to whom you may, if you wish, remain completely unknown. Where, then, is the room for such fear and shame ? These considerations being carefully borne in mind, all the difficulties, on account of which some are led to conceal their sins, completely vanish. Let us, however, glance at them in detail.

The first difficulty arises from a vague fear that the confessor will use your confession in some way to your prejudice. But how can such an idea enter your head? Do you not know very well that he is bound by all laws, human and divine, to preserve the most inviolable secrecy with regard to all he hears in the tribunal of Penance? He can break that secret in no case, not even to promote the greatest imaginable good, nor to avert the greatest imaginable evil—he can break it at no time, neither during your life nor in the hour of your death, nor after your death—nor can he violate it in any way, directly or indirectly, either by words or signs,—he can make use of the information acquired in confession neither for his own benefit nor for that of anyone else. In a word, once confession is ended the confessor, as far as he is concerned, buries your sins in eternal oblivion; and in his words, and actions, and general bearing towards you, he is bound to act as if no confession of yours had ever been made to him. The obligation thus binding him is what is known as the seal of the confessional.

Jesus Christ prescribed these rigorous laws in order that no one of the faithful could ever be exposed to the least fear or the least danger of suffering the slightest loss in reputation, or property, or in any other way, as a result of the accusation of his sins in the sacrament of Penance. And it would truly seem as if Providence watched over this point in a very special manner—while the secret of the confessional has been confided to all sorts of priests, and sometimes to those whose life proved to be little worthy of their sacred character, yet there is not a single example of the secrecy ever having been violated. See, then, how wrong you are in fearing that the sincere accusation of your sins can cause you any harm.

"So far so well," you may say, "but what will the priest say if I accuse myself of such and such a sin? Will he not be surprised and astonished?" This is the second difficulty—the bad impression your confession may make in the mind of the priest. But not even this difficulty has any solid foundation. Your confessor, you say, will be surprised and astonished; as if you were the first from whom he has heard such things! His ear is long ago accustomed to hearing them; and, moreover, what physician is astonished at the diseases he finds attacking the human body? Why was the power of reremitting sins—a ministry all divine—confided not to angels but to men? Is it not in order that from the consciousness of their own weakness and miseries they should learn to be compassionate and indulgent towards those of others? The confessor is a man exposed to the same passions and the same weaknesses as you—he could, perhaps, have committed greater sins than you; and if he has not committed them, he yet carries within him the principle of corruption which would soon induce him to commit them if he had not the special assistance of God. How, then, can he be surprised and astonished at your sins?

"But I shall suffer in his estimation—I shall be held in less esteem by him." And even if that were true should you not bear it patiently? Do you value the confessor's esteem more than the esteem, the grace, and the friendship of God? Even supposing you do lose his esteem, you thereby escape the state of perdition, you gain the friendship of God, you ensure the salvation of your soul. The confessor can never show the slightest sign that he held you in less esteem; and let him think of you as he pleases, what harm can that do you? Even if there is found on earth one person who has less confidence in you, yet you are delivered from your sin and from the greatest of all evils which is the enmity of God.

Yet you are much deceived if you imagine that your confession will lessen his esteem for you. Do you want to know when it is the confessor conceives an unfavourable opinion of a penitent? It is precisely when he sees him accuse himself of the greatest excesses with the greatest indifference; when he sees him blind and insensible to the horror of his state; when he finds him falling back into the same sins over and over again; when he sees him habituated to sin, and living in the occasion of sin; and when he does not find him disposed to abandon these occasions nor to renounce his evil habits. This indeed causes surprise—this indeed leads to a bad impression. But show me a penitent who, touched by the grace of God, struck interiorly by the horror of his state, and sincerely desirous of changing his life and dedicating himself to God, throws himself at the feet of the confessor—such a penitent, no matter how great a sinner he may have been, affords deep consolation to the sacred minister who admires and blesses in him the triumph of divine mercy, and who is much more edified by his good and holy dispositions than he ever could be scandalized at the recital of great disorders. In a word, sins, however grave and enormous, lose to a certain extent their intrinsic filthiness and deformity when they are retracted and effaced by Penance. And have we not the example of the lives of many great saints who had previously been great sinners, and who had given much scandal in their days? And yet we now venerate them on our altars. Be assured, then, that if the confessor loves God and his neighbour, he will bless God a thousand times for having deigned to use his ministry in leading back a sinner who was about to be lost; and if he has not these sentiments, you may be quite sure he stands in great danger of losing his own soul, because he has not that spirit of humility and charity which is necessary to the minister of the sacrament of Penance.

But if, in spite of all I have said just now, you are unable to dispel all your doubts, and you still have fears that by making known your sin you run the risk of losing the esteem of your confessor, the remedy is prompt. Change your confessor—go to another to whom you are completely unknown. You are not bound to confess to any one priest in particular—take advantage, then, of the liberty God gives you, and choose whatever confessor you please.

This liberty (it is highly important to observe) should not be interfered with, but should be respected by parents, teachers, or others who are accustomed to prepare children for the sacrament of Penance. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that they imprudently force those children to go to confession to the same priest as themselves, never reflecting that the fear those children may have—groundless, to be sure, but none the less real—that the confessor may reveal what he hears to their parents or teachers, may lead them to conceal some sin or other and thus become guilty of a sacrilege. Let them, then, have full and perfect liberty on this point. If they ask your advice by all means give it; but let them always see that they are free to go to whatever priest they wish. At the same time great care should be taken to impress them with the fact that they need not have the slightest fear the priest will betray their confidence—let them from their earliest years be thoroughly convinced that whatever they tell the priest in buried for ever in absolute oblivion.

In view of all these considerations whence, I repeat, comes that great difficulty, that great shame you experience in discovering your miseries to one man who is bound to inviolable secrecy, who is subject to the same weaknesses as yourself, and whom you may select at will.

But be it as it may—be your shame as great and as reasonable as possible—you must conquer it and confess your sin; otherwise there is no salvation for you. There can be no salvation if your sin is not cancelled, and sin cannot be cancelled unless confessed. Every other means is useless—fasting, alms deeds, penance may indeed obtain you the graces to conquer your shame and make an open confession; but it is only the sacrament that can remit the sin. Hence I reason thus: either you intend some day to confess the sin that troubles you so long, or you have resolved never to confess it.

If you intend to confess it one day, why not do so now? Do you not see that the longer you delay the greater becomes the difficulty, without speaking of the danger of been suddenly called before the throne of God in this miserable condition? Instead of one single sin, you will later on have to accuse yourself of a hundred; you will have to add how often you have concealed it, how often you have committed it, how often you have received absolution unworthily. The more you defer it, the more you multiply sacrileges, and with them the more you increase the difficulty of confessing; and you forge a chain, you cast yourself into a labyrinth, a chaos, from which you cannot escape even in death.

Not even in death. And in fact we know on very certain grounds that many unfortunate souls who in their last moments were on the point of confessing all their sins, have been prevented from doing so by the demon who assaulted their imagination with new and fiercer feelings of shame, suffocated anew the confession that was trembling on their lips, led them to die unrepentant, and to be for ever damned. From this you will see that to postpone the accusation of your sins is to expose yourself to the danger of never confessing them—not even when you would give anything to be able to do so in that last great moment.

On the other hand you, if you are determined not to make known your sin your perdition is certain, since nothing else can supply the defect of confession. But do you think that by concealing your sin you have taken the best possible care of your reputation? Fools! To avoid a slight but salutary confusion, you go on preparing for yourselves another infinitely greater, hopeless and unavailing. That sin which you now refuse to make known in secret and for your own salvation, God will make known one day before the whole human race, to your unutterable ignominy and eternal damnation. Would it not, then, be better to conquer yourself now than to remain silent to your everlasting misfortune? Where is the invalid who would prefer to die rather than acquaint the physician with his disease no matter how loathsome it may be?

Be on your guard, then, against giving way to so foolish a sin, so pernicious a folly. No matter what the sin into which you have fallen never allow your lips to be closed by feelings of shame. Open your heart sincerely, and begin courageously with that very sin which causes you greater confusion. At the very least, make known to your confessor that you experience some difficulty in disclosing all your sins, and say to him: "Father, I have a sin I am ashamed to confess; help me by questioning me." The priest will do so, he will inspire you with confidence, and you will find yourself emboldened to confess all without reservation.

What would think of a man who, suffering from a violent toothache, yet cannot screw up his courage to have the tooth extracted and hence is distracted with incessant pain night and day? Would you not say to him: "Have courage. Bravely face an operation which if painful is brief, and in a moment you may be certain the pain will be gone." I say the same to you—the sin you carry in your soul will always be a source of torment and remorse; however great your difficulty in confessing it may be, it is only momentary; but you will at once find relief and recompense—a recompense filled with lasting peace and contentment of heart. After God, have perfect confidence in your confessor, and if you have not had it in the past, fail not to have it in the future.

Thirty-first Instruction on the Sacraments

CONFESSION VITIATED BY MALICE

Having spoken in the last instruction of those penitents whose confession is defective by reason of forgetfulness, ignorance, or shame, I now come to speak of those who purposely fall short of the integrity requisite for confession. Few are the penitents who voluntarily and knowingly conceal a mortal sin in confession; but great is the number of those who fail to declare the whole truth owing to reasons other than ignorance, forgetfulness, or shame.

1. In the first place they are wanting in sincerity who obstinately pretend that a certain action is lawful or permissible which is not really so, and who, in spite of the doubts, uneasiness, and remorse by which they are assailed, make no mention of the matter to the confessor. For example: From the evil effect produced on you by a certain friendship, and from the time it costs you, you can clearly see that it is not innocent; but you fear that if you mention the matter to your confessor you will be obliged to break it off, and hence you try to discover various reasons for persuading yourself that it is not really evil. The same may be said of some amusement, some conversation, some source of gain which is not on all fours with the claims of justice. Now what else is this than a ruse by which, to the great prejudice of truth, you would close your eyes to your sins, in order not to be obliged to make them known to your confessor?

Now, in concealing this fault, or this circumstance, you try to persuade yourself that it is no great harm or sin; but I ask a simple question: Is it not true that you experience much shame and difficulty in manifesting the fault or circumstance in question? You have consequently reason to fear that the matter is not so trivial as you try to believe—a simple venial sin, a trifling fault could hardly give rise to such remorse and uneasiness as you experience.

Furthermore I ask: If you were on the point of death, would you still be silent as to this fault, this circumstance? No, you answer, I should take the safest side then. Therefore you should accuse yourself of it now, because the integrity of confession, and the importance of your eternal salvation, oblige you in the same way at all times, and should be well assured no less in life than at the moment of death.

In a word, if your conscience is troubled about anything, you are bound to lay open the state of your soul to your confessor; otherwise, just as to act against conscience does not preserve the action from being sinful, so in the same way to be silent against conscience does not exempt your confesson from sacrilege.

2. In the second place those are wanting in the requisite sincerity who, while not concealing their sins altogether, tell them only in part or mix them up in such a way as not to reveal them at all in reality. It would seen as if there are some who have discovered a means of confessing without really doing so—they tell just enough to set their consciences at rest, and voluntarily and falsely persuade themselves they have accused themselves, whereas in reality they have not accused themselves, since the portrait of themselves which they present to the confessor is far different from what they really are.

I here refer to certain imperfect and half confessions which are occasionally made in such a way that the sin is indeed declared, but its darker features and circumstances are glossed over; such persons make known their bad actions, but conceal the motives and intentions that led them to commit these actions and that lend another colour to the malice of these actions; they discover their wounds, but not the bad habit or the proximate occasion that leads to these wounds; and they act thus in spite of all interrogatories that may be put to them by the confessor.

I also refer to certain vague and confused confessions in which one word is made to cover a multitude of sins, and in which nothing clear or definite is made known to the confessor. You accuse yourself, for instance, of having been ambitious, proud, envious, but all these are passions susceptible of being greater or less in proportion to the greater or less dominion they exercise over you, and the greater or less effects they produce in you—you must consequently explain their colour, their degree, and their results. You accuse yourself of having been carried away by anger—you must, furthermore, explain whether it was grave or light, whether accompanied by insults, affronts, imprecations, desire of vengeance, and if so what sort of vengeance. You accuse yourself in a general way of having had bad thoughts, having said bad words, but you say nothing definite; you make no mention of the multitude of circumstances that can change the species and the gravity of these acts. For example, a woman accuses herself of vanity—but her vanity may have been nothing more than an excessive desire of display without however exceeding certain limits; or it may, on the other hand, be an unrestrained and devouring passion that leads her to considerable loss of time spent in ornamenting her person, to the grave neglect of the duties of her state, to the adoption of immodest and scandalous fashions in dress, to excessive and ruinous expenditure; yet of all this she says not a word, beyond declaring herself guilty of vanity, whereas it is something more serious than vanity that is wrong.

And, then, how many modes of expression are planned by penitents to disguise and gloss over their faults in the eyes of the confessor! The great object of many is not that of making known their sins, but of finding words and expressions to disguise them in confession, and to express themselves with the least possible precision. For instance, a penitent accuses himself of a certain inclination, a certain affection, towards a person of the other sex. If the confession were properly made it would probably be found that the affection in question is nothing short of a violent and sinful passion.

Finally, what shall I say of those who purposely mix up and confuse their sins in order not to be understood; or who gallop over their more shameful sins in order that the confessor may not have time to make suitable reflections thereon; or who mumble their words or speak in such a low tone of voice that it is almost impossible to hear what they say; or who resort to evasions and ambiguous terms which are not understood in their true and proper sense? Fearing both to confess their sin and not to confess it, they end by explaining it in such a way as to do neither the one nor the other. Could anything be more foolish than expedients such as these? The confessor as a rule is not deceived; he often guesses the state of the case, and a chance word from the penitent's lips sometimes enables him to proceed further, dig down to the root of the evil, and drag forth the rottenness that lies concealed in the bottom of the heart.

Now what happens from a confession of this sort? A two-fold evil. On one side you go to the trouble of making a confession—a task that is always disagreeable in itself, no matter how disguised and distorted it may be; and on the other hand you derive no advantage and no consolation from it. How does it happen that on leaving the confessional you are little satisfied with yourself; you do not enjoy that peace and serenity of conscience that is the general result of a good confession, and in the bottom of your heart there always remains a secret source of uneasiness and remorse? It is due precisely to this, that your conscience reproaches you for not having been sincere and truthful, for not having revealed yourself to the confessor exactly as you know yourself to be. Yes, whoever confesses with such evasions and artifices as these, may indeed try to rest content with his confession, but he cannot succeed and his conscience will always reproach him with having failed to display the sincerity that is necessary.

It now remains to speak of that other class of penitents who fail in sincerity, not indeed by concealing or disguising their sins, but by excusing and palliating them—a vice as ancient as sin itself; for from the very beginning of the world, Adam, on being reproved for his sin, at once turned the blame on his wife, and she on the serpent: *The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree and I did eat . . . the serpent deceived me and I did eat.*[1] This disgraceful habit has descended to many and many of their children who are always on the watch for pretexts to justify their transgressions. Some throw the blame on their temperament which, they allege, is very sensual; others on their condition, which they say is dangerous; or, worse still, shift all the blame on to their neighbours' shoulders, thus converting confession itself into downright detraction or calumny. Thus parents attribute their own faults to their children, and children to their parents; the husband to the wife, and the wife to the husband; the master to his servants, servants to their master. But do you not see that these excuses only render you unworthy of the mercy of God? With men, excuses are made for the fault in order to obtain pardon; but with God to excuse the fault is to become unworthy of pardon. Hence the penitent David cried out: *I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord.*[2] Yes, I will confess against myself my iniquity, and in confessing it I will attribute it neither to the instigation of others, nor to the strength of temptation, nor to any bent of my disposition; no, I will bear all the blame, and I will admit having committed the fault because I willingly committed it; I will confess that I alone am guilty, I alone the sinner: *I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord.*

I must not, however, be understood to exclude every kind of excuse from confession—there are in fact excuses which are admissible, proper, and even requisite for the integrity of confession. And what are these? They are those which are genuine and which lessen the malice of the sin. Thus, if in your sin there was not full advertence or perfect consent, say so, because this circumstance often renders venial that which would otherwise be mortal.

But all other excuses which tend to hide the naked truth, or which in no way really diminish the malice of the sins confessed, must be banished; for, in the former case, they destroy the integrity of confession, and in the latter case they diminish the value of contrition.

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[1] Gen. iii. 12, 13.

[2] Ps. xxxi. 5.

If your excuses are not true they destroy the integrity of confession; for example, you accuse yourself of not having fasted on the days commanded, and you allege the excuse of delicate health. If this is true you committed no sin at all, and you could have saved yourself the trouble of confessing the fact. But if it is not true you simply deny your sin in the very act of confessing it. The same may be said of every other precept you may have transgressed, and the transgression of which you try to justify by false or groundless excuses.

But if, on the contrary, your excuses, though true, in no way lessen the malice of the sin, as would be the case with such excuses as the bad character of some person with whom you have to live, the violence of your temptations, the natural weakness of your disposition, and so on—all of which do indeed tend to sin, but they do not force you to sin, since they can be overcome by the grace of God fervently implored—and hence these excuses destroy contrition—how can you truly repent of and detest the faults you seek to minimize and so to say justify in your own eyes?

2. These observations lead me of themselves to speak of the second quality already referred to as requisite for confession—I mean *humility*, without which you will never succeed in surmounting the greatest of all obstacles to the sincerity of your confession. What, in fact, is the origin of the evasions, excuses, and palliations resorted to by penitents to avoid the confusion they deserve, if not that overweening pride that accompanies them even to the tribunal of Penance? They would indeed be willing to accuse themselves, but they are unwilling to defame themselves, or at least they would spare themselves as far as possible; and hence their evasions and subterfuges. It will be very difficult for you to be sincere if you do not bring with you to the tribunal of Penance a true spirit of humility.

Apart from this consideration, what condition can be more fitting or necessary than that of humility? When we kneel before the sacred minister, God's representative, to accuse ourselves of our sins, we are simply so many criminals—we recognize ourselves as such, we accuse ourselves as such, and in this character we throw ourselves on the mercy of God, begging His grace and pardon. Now, what would be thought of a rebellious subject who appeared before his sovereign with a proud and haughty air, without any appearance of sorrow or submission? Simply this: instead of pleasing him it would only irritate him more and more.

Humility, therefore, is essentially requisite—an interior and heartfelt humility which makes you see and detest your state, which leads you to recognize yourself as a sinner, and which makes you willing to be recognized as such even by the confessor—a humility which manifests itself in your countenance, in your attitude, in your words, and in your whole exterior, like that of the publican who covered with confusion at the sight of his sins, prostrated himself in a corner of the temple, and did not dare as much as to raise his eyes towards heaven.

This disposition it is that is frequently missing in certain penitents who approach confession with a sort of bold and haughty air, and who tell their sins much the same as if they were narrating a story that did not concern them at all. What reliance is it possible to place on their dispositions? If they were penetrated with consciousness and hatred of their sins, their very behaviour, their modesty, their humiliation, and their very manner of revealing the grave sins they have committed would save the minister of Jesus Christ from the uneasiness he often experiences with regard to their dispositions. But numbers of Christians are deceived into imagining that to obtain absolution it is enough for them to narrate their faults with sincerity, and they take little trouble to have true contrition for them, and yet of all the acts of the penitent contrition is, as already explained, the most necessary. Hence their confessions are accompanied by no feeling of humility.

If, then, you desire to make a good confession, be sincere and humble. Humility will make known the sovereign hatred you bear to sin, and will show that you are truly penitent; while sincerity will ensure that you hide nothing from the eyes of the confessor. It is only on condition of a sincere and humble confession of our faults that God has promised us pardon of them. Confessions thus made will perhaps be less pleasing to our self-love; but they will be much more agreeable to God and much more fruitful in healing our wounds, and procuring us true peace and contentment of heart.

I must not omit to say something about certain other conditions or qualities laid down by theologians which though not necessary for the validity of the sacrament, are yet useful and desirable. They are principally two.

The first is that confession should be *simple*, that is to say, should be made without adding on or including any statements or explanations that are unnecessary, useless, or extraneous to the confession itself. It is truly a torture for poor confessors to fall in with certain penitents who instead of making known their sins directly and without roundabout statements, insist on giving the whole history and origin of every sin they have to confess. But what use are all such sorties and details? They only serve to waste time, weary and perhaps scandalize the others who are waiting for confession. In confession nothing should be said that does not concern the confession—in other words, nothing except what is or can be a sin—and all tiresome and irrelevant explanations should be avoided.

I know that for your reasonable satisfaction, for the peace and tranquillity of your soul which is precisely the purpose of confession, the confessor must sometimes tolerate wearisome details, especially in the ignorant and uninstructed; but at the same time you should always be ready to curtail such details at his suggestion or request.

A second and much more important condition is that confession should be *prudent*—prudent in the manner in which you accuse yourself of certain sins of impurity, taking care to unfold them as modestly as possible; prudent also with regard to your neighbour's reputation which should be respected as highly in confession as elsewhere. Consequently, you should avoid mentioning the names of the accomplices of your sins or the persons with whom you sinned—it is enough to mention their state in life—whether they are married or single, related to you or not. As regards the circumstances that must necessarily be expressed, if you cannot make them known to one confessor without his knowing the person with whom you have sinned, you ought in this case to seek some other confessor to whom that person is unknown, as long at least as you are able to do so without great inconvenience; and should this be the case, the best plan will be to explain the difficulty to the confessor who will direct you how to proceed and will decide whether you are called on to enter into all the circumstances of the case or not.

One other observation: Although your confessor is accustomed to excite you to contrition before giving you absolution, you nevertheless should not fail to excite it yourself before approaching the sacred tribunal, since otherwise you would expose yourself to the risk of confessing without contrition. Considering the nature of the human heart, and the economy of divine grace, contrition is not a thing that should be regarded as so easy to acquire; and to imagine that you are certain to conceive it by merely hearing the confessor telling you to do so, is a downright act of rashness.

Yet as the words of the confessor can be of great use and influence in exciting you to contrition, it is highly desirable that as soon as you have finished your confession you listen with great attention to his observations, and not allow your mind to be distracted from his words by scrutinizing your conscience to see whether you have said all and forgotten nothing. It is strange but true, that often while your confessor is endeavouring to prepare you for absolution, placing before you the dangers that surround your soul, the greatness of the offence you have given God, the eternal punishments that threaten you, you, on the contrary, repeatedly interrupt him by saying: "I also accuse myself of such a sin which I forgot; and of this other sin, and so on," thus showing that you are so completely occupied in discovering your sins that you pay no heed to his words. Now this is an artifice of the devil; he sees that you devote all your attention to the accusation of your sins, which give him but little concern, provided he is able to distract your attention from all that can excite the requisite compunction in your heart. While you are troubled about remembering all your faults, and while your mind is completely occupied in seeing that you forget nothing, you pay no attention to the motives of contrition that are being suggested to you. Now, if you fail in contrition what use is the exactness of your confession? If you do happen to remember some new sin, by all means make it known as soon as the confessor has done speaking; but that is not the time for investigation and examination—it is the time for making good reflections so as to secure the soundness of your contrition.

These explanations should, I hope, suffice to indicate the proper way to make your confession and the faults to be avoided when making it.

CHAPTER XI

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—(*concluded*)

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

XV.—SATISFACTION—ITS NATURE

62. — Satisfaction is compensation for sins committed.

COMING now to the third part of Penance, which is called satisfaction, it is necessary to begin by accounting for the word and explaining its meaning, especially as the enemies of the Catholic Church have taken ample occasion of the opportunities afforded by this word to sow dissension and discord amongst Christians, to the great detriment of religion.

Satisfaction, then, is the full payment of a debt—the fact a thing is sufficient [or satisfactory] means that nothing more is required. Thus, when we speak of reconciliation to favour, to satisfy means the same as to offer to the angry mind all that is required to atone for the injury that has been done; and accordingly in this case satisfaction is nothing else than compensation for an injury done to another. But, coming to the object that is now to occupy us, theologians have used the word satisfaction to denote that compensation which is made when man offers some sort of reparation to God for the sins he has committed.

63.—There are various grades of satisfaction.

Now, as in this class of satisfaction there can be several degrees, it consequently follows that the word may be taken in various senses.

(*a*) The first and most excellent is that by which all that we owe to God on account of our sins is abundantly paid, even were He to deal with us according to the full rigour of justice. Now this degree of satisfaction is precisely that which appeases God, and renders Him propitious to us, and it is a satisfaction we can attribute to none other than Christ our Lord, who paid on the Cross the price of our sins and abundantly satisfied the justice of God. Nothing created could ever possess such value as to free us from so heavy a debt; for as St. John declares: *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not* *for ours alone, but also for those of the whole world.*[1] This, then, is full and complete satisfaction perfectly and adequately proportioned to the debt due for all the sins that are committed by all mankind, and in virtue of which man's works acquire great merit in the sight of God, and without which they could not be regarded as of any value. The words of the Psalmist seem to allude to this fact, when reflecting within himself he cried out: *What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He hath rendered to me,*[2] and being unable to find any worthy recompense for all His favours except that satisfaction which he expressed by the word *chalice,* he added: *I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.*

(*b*) A second class of satisfaction is that which is known as CANONICAL, and which is made within a fixed and determinate time. Hence it was a most ancient practice in the Church to inflict some punishment on penitents on their being absolved for their sins, and the undergoing of this punishment was usually called satisfaction.

(*c*) By the same word is denoted any and every kind of punishment which is not imposed by the priest but which we spontaneously undertake and voluntarily inflict on ourselves.

64.—The satisfaction which pertains to Penance is that imposed by the priest.

This latter class of satisfaction forms no part of Penance as a sacrament—that satisfaction alone is such which, as we have said, is imposed by the authority of the priest in payment of the debt we owe to God on account of our sins; along with this there must be understood the firm resolution and firm purpose to avoid sin with the greatest care for the future.

In fact some have laid it down that to satisfy is to give God the honour due to Him; now, it is clear that no one who is not determined absolutely to avoid sin can give God the honour due to Him. Others maintain that to satisfy is to cut off the occasions of sin, and to allow its suggestions no entrance into our hearts.

In accordance with this notion of satisfaction others have held that satisfaction is a cleansing which wipes away every defilement that remains in the soul on account of sin, and by which we become exempt from the temporal punishments due by us.

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[1] 1 John ii. 2.

[2] Ps. cxv. 12.

XVI.—NECESSITY OF SATISFACTION

65.—After sin is forgiven a temporal punishment sometimes remains to be paid.

Such being the case, it will not be difficult to show the faithful how necessary it is for penitents to practise works of satisfaction.

The pastor will accordingly point out to them that sin involves two consequences—stain and punishment; and that although once the stain is remitted, the punishment of eternal death in the flames of hell is at the same time always condoned; yet, as the Council of Trent declares, it does not always follow that God remits the remains of sin or the temporal punishment due to sin.

Of this truth we have clear examples in Holy Writ, as, for instance, in the third chapter of Genesis, the twelfth and twenty-second of the Book of Numbers, and in many other places; but the most celebrated and striking of all is that of David. Though the Prophet Nathan had said to him: *The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die,*[1] yet he voluntarily underwent the severest penances, day and night imploring God's mercy in these words: *Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; for I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.*[2] Thus did he beseech God to condone not only his crime but also the punishment due to his crime; to purify him from the stains of sin; and to restore him to his former state of innocence and integrity. Yet, in spite of his fervent prayers and petitions, the Lord punished him by the loss of his child, born of adultery, by the rebellion and death of his tenderly beloved son Absolom, and by other pains and penalties with which He had previously threatened him. In Exodus also we read that though the Lord yielded to the prayer of Moses, and spared His idolatrous people, yet He threatened that He would inflict severe punishment on their crime; and Moses himself declared that the Lord would take vengeance on it even down to the third and fourth generation. That this has always been the teaching of the Fathers in the Catholic Church their own testimony abundantly proves.

66.—This punishment is remitted in Baptism — Why not in Penance?

Why it is that all the punishment due to sin is not condoned in the sacrament of Penance, as in the sacrament of Baptism, is admirably explained by the Council of Trent as follows: "Divine justice seems to demand that they who, through ignorance, have sinned previously to Baptism should be received into God's grace on different conditions from those who have already been delivered from sin and the slavery of the devil, and having received the gift of the Holy Ghost, yet do not hesitate knowingly *to profane God's temple*[1] and *grieve the Holy Ghost.*[2] It is also in keeping with divine clemency not to remit our sins without demanding some satisfaction; for otherwise we might, on that account, be exposed to the danger of regarding our sins as less grievous than they are in reality, of becoming, so to say, offensive and contumelious to the Holy Ghost, and of falling into others still more serious, thus treasuring up to ourselves *wrath against the day of wrath.*[3] For there can be no doubt that these penances strongly restrain us, and serve as a bridle to keep us from falling into sin, while rendering the penitent more cautious and vigilant for the future."

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[1] 2 Kings xii. 13.

[2] Ps. l. 4, 5.

To this it should be added that they serve as testimonies of the sorrow we conceive on account of the sins we have committed; and in this way they offer satisfaction to the Church which is grievously offended by our crimes. For, as St. Augustine notes: "God never despises a contrite and humble heart; but as the heartfelt grief of one is generally concealed from another, and as it is not manifested to others either by words or signs, rightly are times of penance established by those who govern the Church, so as to make reparation to the Church in which these same sins are remitted."

67.—Our penances can be advantageous to others as well as to ourselves.

Moreover, the example of our penances teaches others how they ought to regulate their lives and cultivate the practice of piety—when they see the punishments inflicted on us for our sins they will readily understand how vigilantly they should watch over their whole life and reform their previous evil conduct.

The Church, therefore, very wisely ordained that when a crime had been committed publicly by anyone a public penance should be imposed on him, in order that others might be deterred through fear and thus avoid like sins more carefully for the future—a practice that was sometimes observed even in the case of secret sins of more than usual gravity.

But as regards public sins it was, as we have said, the invariable practice not to absolve those who were guilty of them, till they had undertaken to do public penance; and during the time of that penance the pastors prayed God for their salvation and ceased not to encourage the penitents themselves to do the same. In this respect, great was the care and solicitude of St. Ambrose, of whom it is related that numbers who approached the sacrament of Penance with hearts hardened by sin were so softened by his tears as to conceive the sorrow of true contrition.

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[1] 1 Cor. iii. 17.

[2] Eph. iv. 30.

[3] Rom. ii. 5.

But in the course of time the rigour of the ancient practice has been so relaxed and charity has grown so cold that many of the faithful no longer regard interior sorrow of soul and grief of heart as necessary to obtain pardon of sin—they imagine it is enough to display the mere appearance of repentance.

68.—By penance we are conformed to Christ.

Again; by undergoing these penances we are enabled to be made like unto Jesus Christ, our Head, who Himself suffered and was tempted. Nothing is more unseemly, as was remarked by St. Bernard, than a delicate limb under a head crowned with thorns; for, as the Apostle testifies, *we are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, yet so if we suffer with Him;*[1] and elsewhere, he writes: *If we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.*[2]

69.—And God's justice is made known in us.

Furthermore, St. Bernard observes that there are two effects found in sin—a stain on the soul and a wound; that the stain or defilement of sin is indeed removed by the mercy of God; but that to heal the wounds inflicted on the soul it is necessary to apply the remedy of Penance. When a wound has been healed certain scars still remain to be attended to, so when the guilt of sin has been forgiven the blemishes left by sin have still to be removed. This is very clearly indicated by St. John Chrysostom, who properly remarks: "It is not enough that the arrow has been extracted from the body—the wound it has inflicted must also be healed; so with regard to the soul, the scar left by sin, even after pardon of that sin has been obtained, must be treated by penance." And St. Augustine constantly insists that in penance there are two things to be considered, God's mercy and justice —His mercy pardoning sins and the eternal punishment due to them; and His justice punishing man by temporary punishment.

70.—Finally God's vengeance is disarmed.

Finally, the satisfaction imposed on us disarms the vengeance of God, and averts the punishment decreed against us. Thus teaches the Apostle: *If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but*

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[1] Rom viii. 17.

[2] 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

whilst we are judged we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world.[1] If all this is explained to the faithful it will be almost impossible for them to avoid being strongly excited to embrace works of penance.

XVII.—EFFICACY AND EFFECTS OF SATISFACTION

71.—Source of the efficacy of works of penance.

The great efficacy of satisfaction may be understood from the fact that its virtue depends wholly on the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, which merits impart to our good works two unutterable advantages—the first is that of meriting the reward of eternal glory, so much so that the cup of cold water given in His name shall not be without its reward; and the second, that of being able to satisfy for our sins.

72.—Our satisfaction does not diminish the value of the satisfaction of Christ.

Nor does this lessen the perfect and superabundant satisfaction of Christ our Lord, but, on the contrary, renders it much more conspicuous and glorious. The grace of Jesus Christ appears all the more copious because of the fact that it communicates to us not only what He merited and paid of Himself alone, but also what, as Head, He merited and paid in His members, that is in the saints and the just. Hence it becomes clear how it is that the good and upright actions of pious souls possess such value and importance—as the head infuses life into its members, and as the vine into its branches, so Christ our Lord continually pours forth His grace into those who are united to Him by charity. This grace always precedes, accompanies, and follows our good works; and without it we can neither merit nor make satisfaction to God in any possible way.

And so it comes to pass that nothing seems wanting to the just—by the works they perform with divine assistance they are able on the one hand to satisfy God's Law as far as human frailty permits, and on the other hand they are enabled to merit eternal life, the possession of which they enter into if they die in a state of grace. Our Saviour's words are known to all: *He that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.*[2]

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[1] 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.

[2] John iv. 13, 14.

XVIII.—CONDITIONS AND MODES OF SATISFACTION

73.—Two things requisite in satisfaction—the state of grace and painful works.

Two things are especially requisite in satisfaction—the first is that he who satisfies be just and a friend of God, since works that are done without faith and charity cannot possibly be agreeable to God; the second is that the works performed be of such a nature as to cause some pain and trouble—since they are undertaken in compensation for past sins, and to use the words of St. Cyprian, are the ransom of sin, they must necessarily be in some way distasteful to human nature, even though it does not always happen that those who undergo them experience the sense of pain. The habit of doing penance, or the ardent love of God, often prevents the soul from being conscious of the bitterness of the penitential works it undergoes. These works, however, do not on that account cease to possess the virtue of works of satisfaction. It is even the privilege of the children of God to be so inflamed with sentiments of love and piety that even in the midst of the cruellest sufferings they either feel no pain at all, or bear it all with indescribable joy.

74.—The works of satisfaction are of three classes—prayer, fasting and alms-deeds.

The pastor will also explain that all kinds of satisfaction are reducible to these three heads—prayer, fasting and alms-deeds, which correspond to three classes of goods we have received from God, those of the soul, those of the body, and those called external goods. Nothing is fitter and more effectual than these for the complete extirpation of the roots of every class of sin from the soul; for since, *all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life,*[1] it is clear that to these three sources of disease three remedies are properly applied—to the first, fasting; to the second, alms-deeds; and to the third prayer.

Moreover, if we consider those whom we have injured by our sins, we shall easily see why all kinds of satisfaction are reduced to these three. For those offended by our sins are God, our neighbour and ourselves; now by prayer we appease God, by alms we make satisfaction to our neighbour, and by fasting we chastise ourselves.

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[1] 1 John ii. 16.

75.—The advantages of affliction.

But as many and various afflictions and calamities affect us as long as we are in this life it should be carefully pointed out to the faithful that those who patiently bear the trials and afflictions sent them by God acquire an abundant source of satisfaction and merit; but, on the other hand, that those who bear their trials impatiently and reluctantly deprive themselves of all the fruits of satisfaction, merely enduring the punishment which the just judgment of God inflicts on their sins.

76.—One can satisfy for another.

And here, with praise and thanks we ought to proclaim the infinite goodness and clemency of God, who so far condescended to our weakness as to permit one to satisfy for another—a privilege, however, strictly limited to this [the third] part of the sacrament of Penance. As no one can in the matter of contrition and confession repent or confess for another; so those who are in the grace of God can pay for another the satisfaction due to God, and thus in some way we may be said to bear each other's burdens.

Of this truth we cannot have the least doubt, confessing as we do in the Apostle's Creed our belief in the "Communion of Saints." The fact that, cleansed in the same Baptism, we are all born again to Christ; that we are all partakers of the same sacraments, and especially that we are all fed and refreshed on the same food and drink of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—all this is a clear proof that we are all members of the same body. As, then, the foot does not exercise its functions for its own sake alone, but also for the sake of the eyes; and as the eyes do not see merely for their own sake, but for the common good of all the members; so also works of satisfaction must be regarded as common to all the members of the Church.

77.—There are, however, certain exceptions.

This, however, is true only under certain limitations, if we consider all the advantages derived from satisfaction. For of the works of satisfaction some are medicinal and remedial and are prescribed to the penitent to heal the unregulated affections of his soul. It is evident that those who do not satisfy for themselves can have no share in the fruits of this class of satisfaction.

This, then, is what the pastor will take care to explain clearly and fully to his flock in reference to the three parts of Penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

XIX.—ABSOLUTION

78.—Absolution is to be refused till the penitent has promised to make restitution.

There is one thing on which confessors should be very particular, and it is that, having heard the penitent's sins, they should, before giving him absolution, take special care to oblige him to make full reparation for any injury he may have done his neighbour in his goods or character to such an extent as to merit eternal damnation. No one can be absolved until he has first promised to restore all that belongs to others.

But as there are many who readily promise to do their duty in this respect, yet who are fully determined not to keep their promise, it is absolutely necessary at all costs to oblige them to make restitution. The words of the Apostle should be frequently impressed on their minds: *He that stole, let him now steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands that which is good, that he may have something to give to him that suffereth need.*[1]

79.—Penance should be discreetly imposed.

But in imposing penance the priest will bear in mind that he must not act arbitrarily, but that everything must be regulated in accordance with the dictates of justice, prudence, and piety. And to show that he measures sins according to this rule and to make penitents still more conscious of the gravity of their sins, it will be highly useful sometimes to remind them of the penances known as penitential which were laid down by the ancient canons of the Church for certain classes of sins. The nature of the sin shall consequently regulate the measure of the satisfaction.

But of all penances, the most useful to impose on penitents is that during a certain definite number of days they should devote some time to prayer, and should pour forth their prayers to God for all mankind, and especially for those who have died in the Lord.

They should be also exhorted to undertake of their own accord, the frequent performance of the works of satisfaction prescribed to them by the confessor; and thus so to regulate their life and conduct that, faithfully complying with all that relates to the sacrament, they will at the same time never abandon the pursuit and practice of the virtue of penance.

But if public penance has sometimes to be imposed on account of public crimes, and if the penitent is reluctant, or if he seeks to be exempt from it, he should not be listened to too readily; but he should be persuaded to submit voluntarily and cheerfully to what is sure to prove salutary both to himself and to others.

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[1] Eph. iv. 28.

In all his instructions on the sacrament of Penance, and on each of its parts, the pastor will aim not only at making his flock thoroughly understand the truths he teaches, but also, with God's help, at leading them to put them in practice devoutly and religiously.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE—*concluded*

9. SATISFACTION OR PENANCE

Q. What is satisfaction ?

A. Satisfaction, which is also called sacramental penance, is one of the acts of the penitent by which he makes a certain reparation to the justice of God for his sins, by performing the works the confessor imposes on him.

Q. Is the penitent bound to accept the penance imposed on him by the confessor ?

A. Yes, the penitent is bound to accept the penance imposed on him by the confessor if he can perform it ; and if he cannot, he should humbly say so, and ask some other penance.

Q. When should the penance be performed ?

A. If the confessor has fixed no time, the penance should be performed as soon as convenient, and as far as possible while in the state of grace.

Q. How should the penance be performed ?

A. The penance should be performed entirely and devoutly.

Q. Why is a penance imposed in confession ?

A. A penance is imposed because, after sacramental absolution which remits sin and its eternal punishment, there generally remains a temporal punishment to be undergone, either in this world or in Purgatory.

Q. Why has our Lord willed to remit all the punishment due to sin in the sacrament of Baptism, and not in the sacrament of Penance ?

A. Our Lord has willed to remit all the punishment due to sin in the sacrament of Baptism, and not in the sacrament of Penance, because the sins after Baptism are much more grievous, being committed with fuller knowledge and greater ingratitude for God's benefits, and also in order that the obligation of satisfying for them may restrain us from falling into sin again.

Q. Can we of ourselves make satisfaction to God ?

A. Of ourselves we cannot make satisfaction to God, but we certainly can do so by uniting ourselves to Jesus Christ, who gives value to our actions by the merits of His passion and death.

Q. Does the penance which the confessor imposes always suffice to discharge the punishment which remains due to our sins ?

A. The penance which the confessor imposes does not ordinarily suffice to discharge the punishment remaining due to our sins ; and hence we must try to supply it by other voluntary penances.

Q. Which are the works of penance ?

A. The works of penance may be reduced to three kinds : Prayer, Fasting, and Alms-deeds.

Q. What is meant by prayer ?

A. By prayer is meant every kind of pious exercise.

Q. What is meant by fasting ?

A. By fasting is meant every kind of mortification.

Q. What is meant by almsgiving?

A. By almsgiving is meant every spiritual or corporal work of mercy.

Q. Which penance is the more meritorious, that which the confessor gives, or that which we do of our own choice ?

A. The penance which the confessor imposes is the most meritorious, because being part of the sacrament it receives greater virtue from the merits of the passion of Jesus Christ.

Q. Do those who die after having received absolution but before they have fully satisfied the justice of God, go straight to Heaven ?

A. No, they go to Purgatory there to satisfy the justice of God and be perfectly purified.

Q. Can the souls in Purgatory be relieved of their pains by us ?

A. Yes, the souls in Purgatory can be relieved by our prayers, alms-deeds, all our other good works, and by indulgences, but above all by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Q. Besides his penance, what else must the penitent do after confession ?

A. Besides performing his penance after confession, the penitent, if he has unjustly injured another in his goods or reputation, or if he has given him scandal, must as soon as possible, and as far as he is able, restore him his goods, repair his honour, and remedy the scandal.

Q. How can the scandal given be remedied ?

A. The scandal given can be remedied by removing the occasion of it and by edifying by word and example those whom we have scandalized.

Q. How should we make satisfaction to one whom we have offended ?

A. We should make satisfaction to one whom we have offended, by asking his pardon, or by some other suitable reparation.

Q. What fruits does a good confession produce in us ?

A. A good confession—(1) Remits the sins we have committed and gives us the grace of God ; (2) Restores us peace and quiet of conscience ; (3) Reopens the gates of Heaven and changes the eternal punishment of hell into a temporal punishment ; (4) Preserves us from falling again, and renders us capable of partaking of the treasury of Indulgences.

10. INDULGENCES

Q. What is an Indulgence ?

A. An Indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due on account of our sins which have been already pardoned as far as their guilt is concerned—a remission accorded by the Church outside the sacrament of Penance.

Q. From whom has the Church received the power to grant Indulgences ?

A. The Church has received the power to grant Indulgences from Jesus Christ.

Q. In what way does the Church by means of Indulgences remit this temporal punishment ?

A. The Church by means of Indulgences remits this temporal punishment by applying to us the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Saints, which constitute what is known as the *Treasure of the Church.*

Q. Who has the power to grant Indulgences ?

A. The Pope alone has the power to grant Indulgences in the whole Church, and the Bishop in his own diocese, according to the faculty given him by the Pope.

Q. How many kinds of Indulgences are there ?

A. Indulgences are of two kinds—plenary and partial.

Q. What is a plenary Indulgence?

A. A plenary Indulgence is that by which the whole temporal punishment due to our sins is remitted. Hence, if one were to die after having gained such an Indulgence, he would go straight to Heaven, being, as he is, perfectly exempt from the pains of Purgatory.

Q. What is a partial Indulgence?

A. A partial Indulgence is that by which is remitted only a part of the temporal punishment due to our sins.

Q. Why does the Church grant Indulgences?

A. In granting Indulgences the Church intends to aid our incapacity to expiate all the temporal punishment in this world, by enabling us to obtain by means of works of piety and Christian charity that which in the first ages Christians gained by the rigour of Canonical penances.

Q. What is meant by an Indulgence of forty or a hundred days, or of seven years, and the like?

A. By an Indulgence of forty or a hundred days, or of seven years and the like, is meant the remission of so much of the temporal punishment as would have been paid by penances of forty or a hundred days, or seven years, anciently prescribed in the Church.

Q. What value should we set on Indulgences?

A. We should set the greatest value on Indulgences because by them we satisfy the justice of God and obtain possession of Heaven sooner and more easily.

Q. Which are the conditions necessary to gain Indulgences?

A. The conditions necessary to gain Indulgences are—(1) The state of grace (at least at the final completion of the work), and freedom from those venial faults, the punishment of which we wish to cancel; (2) The fulfilment of all the works the Church enjoins in order to gain the Indulgence; (3) The intention to gain it.

Q. Can Indulgences be applied also to the souls in Purgatory?

A. Yes, Indulgences can be applied also to the souls in Purgatory, when he who grants them says that they may be so applied.

Q. What is a Jubilee?

A. A Jubilee, which as a rule is granted every twenty-five years, is a plenary Indulgence to which are attached many privileges and special concessions, such as that of being able to obtain absolution from certain reserved sins and from censures, and the commutation of certain vows.

Thirty-second Instruction on the Sacraments

SACRAMENTAL SATISFACTION

Contrition and confession, which are the two first acts of the penitent, having been considered in previous instructions, it now remains for me to speak of the third act which is satisfaction, of which it may be said in all truth, that it is the least known part of the sacrament. As a rule the idea people have of satisfaction is of the vaguest possible description, and neither corresponds to the teaching of Sacred Scripture and of the Fathers, nor to the nature of that reparation which God demands of us, when in His goodness and mercy He changes the eternal punishment we have deserved into a temporal punishment. And being so imperfectly known it is little wonder that it is so imperfectly performed. For what do we really find it to be, as a general rule ? Simply a few easy exercises in compensation for grave excesses—a few brief moments of prayer in reparation for whole years spent in every kind of sin. Of this you will have convincing evidence in the course of the exposition of Christian Doctrine on this point which I am now about to make.

Satisfaction, according to the explanation given in the Roman Catechism is the compensation we owe to God for the sins we have committed, or a reparation for the injury we have done Him. Every Christian is bound to make this reparation, even after having received remission of his sins in the sacrament of Penance ; for in pardoning us our sins, the Lord, as the Council of Trent declares, does not as a rule, remit all the punishment due to them, but in place of the eternal punishment we have deserved, He substitutes another kind of punishment—a temporal punishment—which must be borne either in this life or in the life to come.

Sacred Scripture supplies abundant examples of this truth. God pardoned Adam his disobedience, yet drove him from the earthly paradise, and condemned him to suffer throughout his long life of nine hundred years toil and fatigue, and finally death itself. At the prayer of Moses, God pardoned the Israelites their crime of idolatry ; but in punishment of their sin they were excluded from the Promised Land, and condemned to wander for forty years in the desert. David, who had been guilty of adultery and homicide, was assured by the Prophet Nathan that his sins were forgiven ; yet in punishment of his crime the same Prophet announced to him the death of the fruit of his sin with Bethsabee, the dishonour of his own wife, the rebellion of his children, and other misfortunes that were to sadden all the days of his life. Now, just as these facts, and many others it would be easy to cite, prove that God severely punishes sin, even though it is already pardoned, so also they show it is His will that we should voluntarily punish them in ourselves.

I have said that this generally happens ; for God sometimes remits sin and punishment altogether without any reservation whatever. as is the case when our sorrow is caused by perfect love of God, by perfect contrition. To this contrition is attached every grace, every privilege. It justifies us even outside the sacrament, on the sole condition that we have the desire to receive the sacrament ; it furthermore liberates us from all punishment both temporal and eternal ; and hence if we were to die that instant our soul would at once be admitted to the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision of God. But as it is difficult to be altogether certain that our contrition is really perfect, so also is it difficult to be certain that we have received the remission of all the punishment due by us on account of sin ; and even though we do actually succeed in conceiving such contrition, we must, nevertheless, act in accordance with what ordinarily happens, simply because we cannot be certain of our contrition without direct revelation from God. But apart from the case of perfect contrition, the rule remains fixed and binding, that we must satisfy the justice of God for our sins, even though these sins have been already forgiven.

It is on this principle that the penances are founded which are imposed by the confessor before imparting the benefit of absolution—penances which ought to be in proportion to the number and gravity of the sins committed, and which, even when hard and considerable in the highest possible degree, can never be considered derogatory to the infinite satisfaction of Jesus Christ applied to us in this sacrament, as the Protestant reformers ignorantly or calumniously imagine—ignorantly if they do not understand Catholic teaching which is clear and unmistakable on this point ; calumniously, if they merely pretend not to understand it.

For these penances are imposed not because the infinite satisfactions of Christ are in any way defective or insufficient, but because God applies them to us only on the strict condition that we unite our own to His. And rightly so ; for would it be just that the pardon given us by God should cost us nothing, while it has cost so much to Jesus Christ ? If He who was innocence itself submitted to punishment and sufferings, and even to the sacrifice of the Cross, solely because He had taken on Himself our sins, are we who are the true culprits to be exempt from all and every punishment? What account should we make of sins if they did not leave some painful consequence behind them for us to suffer? Would not our readiness to commit them be increased and multiplied? Hence the necessity of satisfactions, which indeed so far from being derogatory to the merit of the satisfaction of Christ derive therefrom all their value and efficacy,—of themselves they would be of no avail, if they were not united to His. This, by way of digression—a digression, however, rendered necessary by the false interpretations put on Catholic teaching by unbelievers and calumniators.

To return to our subject. Although we can make satisfaction to God in many kinds of penance, including penance voluntary undertaken as will be explained later on, nevertheless the satisfaction which is part of the sacrament and which for this reason has greater virtue and efficacy in expiating our sins is that which is enjoined by the confessor, and which is usually known as sacramental penance. It is not an essential part of the sacrament which in fact produces its effect the instant the priest pronounces the words of absolution and consequently before the penance enjoined can be performed. Indeed it often happens that this penance is never performed at all, as, for instance, in the case of sudden death following immediately on absolution; but at the same time it is an integral part—the finishing touch completing the sacrament which would otherwise remain imperfect. Hence it is that the confessor can neither omit to impose it nor the penitent neglect to perform it, provided it is possible to do so; for the confessor is bound to administer the sacrament and the penitent to receive it not only in its essence but also in its integrity.

This being understood, there are two chief points to be examined in this connexion: (1) The faults that are usually committed in reference to sacramental penance; and (2) The insufficiency of this penance to render to God a satisfaction proportioned to our fault; and hence the necessity of adding voluntary penances of our own thereto.

Now, there are three principal defects into which penitents often fall in the matter of the penance enjoined on them—by refusing to accept it; by not performing it; or by performing it badly.

1. By refusing to accept the penance imposed. Not indeed that persons are easily found to refuse any and every kind of penance, for such would be a sign that they are absolutely unworthy of absolution. But it is not rare to meet with those who object to some particular kind of penance and ask to have it changed to something else. This, however, is not always blameworthy—sometimes it is even the proper thing to do. Thus, suppose your confessor were not

sufficiently instructed on all the circumstances of your case, and that he were to impose a penance morally impossible, or at least very difficult for you to perform, you are quite justified in notifying the fact to him, and asking him to change the penance into something else.

The confessor as soon as he knows the state of the case will not be slow to do as you request, since in accordance with the teaching of the Council of Trent it is his duty when imposing penance to take into account the number and gravity of the sins, and along with this, the capacity and particular circumstances of his penitents also.

What is blameworthy is the refusal to accept the penance properly imposed and the demand to have it changed into something else, merely because it is somewhat inconvenient and burthensome, or because of frivolous pretexts and empty excuses. The answer to all this is: satisfaction is not a mere ceremony—it is a punishment inflicted on both soul and body to repair the injury done to God, to redeem the chastisements due to our sins, and to preserve us from sinning again. Now, after being guilty of mortal sin, to refuse to submit to whatever penance is imposed is an evident proof of the absence of that true contrition of heart. A true penitent, far from abhorring penance, embraces with humble submission all the works of satisfaction imposed on him.

Greater still would be the presumption of those who refuse certain penances which should even prove acceptable to a penitent resolved to continue in God's friendship. For instance, if to destroy some criminal habit in you the confessor imposes the salutary penance of going to confession once or twice a month for a year, and if you refuse to accept it, and declare yourself ready to accept any other penance but that, whence arise your repugnance and opposition? Is it not because frequent confession is an obstacle to sin and is consequently too repressing to one who is not resolved to renounce sin completely? In the same way there are others who dislike penances, mortifications, prayers, meditations, which are enjoined for each day during a certain period; and who instead would prefer a severer penance provided it could be performed all at once. But is not such daily penance, light though it is, a powerful means of preserving the memory of the sins on account of which it was enjoined, and consequently of recalling also each day the engagements and promises undertaken before God? In a word, those difficulties made by some penitents in this respect are far from being a good sign—if you are truly contrite every penance that may be imposed on you will seem light.

2. The second defect is that of those who accept the penance but who do not perform it. Now, what are we to say of such? In

penance we must distinguish two things carefully—one is the actual performance of the work imposed by the confessor, which is subsequent to confession; the other is the will to perform it, which must accompany confession itself. The former is not an essential part of the sacrament—it is, as I have said, only an integral part; but the intention to make satisfaction is an essential part of the sacrament—as essential as sorrow for sin, since true sorrow for sins cannot be conceived without firm resolution of expiating them, and of making satisfaction for them to God.

This being borne in mind, it is easy to see that if the penance is omitted because there was no will or intention to perform it, not even in the very moment of receiving it, the sacrament is null through absence of the requisite dispositions. If, on the contrary, the real intention to perform it did exist, but if it is actually omitted later on owing to laziness or negligence or forgetfulness, the sacrament is valid provided it is defective in no other way; and the omission will be sinful—will in fact amount to a mortal sin, if the penance thus enjoined and neglected was grave and had been imposed for grave faults. Penance being an integral part of the sacrament, it is not lawful to omit it; and just as the confessor is bound to administer the sacrament integrally and in all its parts, so also the penitent must perform it in all its parts; otherwise the obligation of accepting it would be worthless or useless.

So far is it from being lawful for the penitent to omit his penance, that it is not even lawful for him to change it of his own authority into some other penance even though the latter should be greater and apparently better. For the sacrament was instituted in the form of a trial, and hence he who is guilty must abide by the penalty inflicted by the judge—he is at liberty to substitute no other penalty. Hence you will see that if owing to some reason or another the penance enjoined on you became impractical or inopportune, you should if possible seek the same confessor in order to secure the desired change.

3. Finally, the third defect is that of those who do indeed perform the penance, but who do so badly. This can happen in two ways.

First, by deferring its performance too long. If the confessor does not determine the time within which it is to be performed, you are bound not to defer it so long as to expose yourself to the danger of forgetting it, or of being unable to perform it. But if he does determine the time in such a way that the penance is attached to such and such a day, you should perform it in the time fixed and no other.

Secondly, by performing it negligently. You cannot but be aware that the pious and devout manner of fulfilling a precept is a necessary condition for the attainment of the object aimed at by the precept. Hence, just as a person who is greatly distracted during Mass on Sunday assists thereat without fruit, so also he who performs his penance carelessly does not fulfil his obligation in this respect.

But what is to be said of those who fall into sin before having commenced their penance, or before having completely performed it? The answer is that they are none the less bound to finish it—it is still good and sufficient for the integrity of the confession. But is it still meritorious? Certainly not, because the source of all merit is the state of grace. But does it at least satisfy for the sins committed? Not even this, because the Roman Catechism teaches that he who makes satisfaction must be just "and a friend of God." Yet here also we must distinguish two things in the penance imposed by the confessor, and these are the commands of the confessor and the remission of the punishment due to sin which is the object of the penance. You satisfy the command even when you perform the penance in a state of mortal sin, but you do not obtain remission of the punishment which cannot be remitted as long as the sin exists. There are, however, some respectable authorities who hold that these works are not deprived of all satisfactory value, provided all affection to sin is rejected; and hence I would recommend you in case you have fallen away from the state of grace to be careful to make an act of sincere contrition before commencing the performance of your penance.

These are the chief points to be noted in reference to the penance imposed by the priest in the sacrament of Penance. Examine yourself carefully, and see how and in what spirit you have been accustomed to perform it; and in case you have omitted or forgotten it in whole or in part, be careful to accuse yourself of the fact in the course of your confession.

Especially do not be too ready to complain if your confessor sometimes thinks it advisable to impose a severer penance than usual—in doing so he is acting for your interest and advantage. Penances imposed in confession have special value, because the merits of Jesus Christ are especially applied to them, and consequently they produce that fruit in virtue of the sacrament itself. It is not too much to say that an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* imposed by the priest is of more avail than a whole Rosary recited of your own choice

A still stronger and more decisive reason is this, that while the penance enjoined by the confessor suffices for the integrity of the confession, it does not suffice to pay the satisfaction we owe to God.

Whatever be the penance imposed on us, it never equals the full measure of all for which we are indebted to divine justice.

This reflection brings me to the second and perhaps more important of the two considerations set forth in the beginning of this instruction ; but as time does not now permit I will defer it to the next instruction, in which I shall point out the necessity of not limiting ourselves to the penances imposed in confession, but of adding other voluntary satisfactions of our own if we do not wish to carry with us to the other life an immense load of debts to God to be paid in the torments of Purgatory, which are far more severe than all the penances that could be undertaken in this life.

Thirty-third Instruction on the Sacraments

EXTRA-SACRAMENTAL AND VOLUNTARY PENANCES

In our last instruction I spoke of the sacramental penance imposed by the priest in the tribunal of Penance ; but is this penance sufficient to pay the debt we have contracted in the sight of God, or to make the satisfaction His justice requires of us ? Certainly not. Let us now see the reason of this, and let us also see the manner in which we should supply for all our deficiencies, and the great importance of doing so.

It is indubitable that penance must have a certain proportion to the sins committed, so that the graver and more numerous our sins, the severer and more rigorous must be the penance. Hence it is that the primitive Church, seeming almost to distrust its ministers in the imposition of penance, fixed and determined by definite legislation the penance to be imposed on each particular sin. Bear this point well in mind all you who become discontented and angry when your confessor imposes a harder penance than usual ; and consider the punishment your sins really deserve.

For certain enormous sins punishment was imposed extending over the whole course of the penitent's life, and complete reconciliation was granted only on the point of death. But as a rule, the punishment inflicted by the Church, even for one mortal sin, was either three or five or seven or even ten or twelve years of rigorous penance in sack-cloth, mortification, fasting—penances long in duration as well as rigorous in quality, and which were strictly enforced during several centuries. It is true that later on the Church, in consideration of the weakness and debility of her children, left the imposition of penance to the judgment and discretion of the priest ; but although the practice on this point has been changed, the spirit that underlies it has never changed, because, when all is said, the obligation of doing penance laid down for us by Jesus Christ continues still the same—God who is now offended by our sins is the same God as was offended of old ; the sin now committed is the same great evil as it was in the centuries of fervour. Hence, although the Church does not now bind us to the observance of the canonical penances, she nevertheless insists that confessors be acquainted with them, so as to make the penances they impose as proportionate as possible to the ancient severity; she directs them to draw the penitent's attention to them so that from the severity of the penance formerly inflicted he may form a just idea of his sins, and hold them in lively horror; she orders them finally to impose salutary penance, regulated on the one hand by discretion and prudence, yet on the other hand bearing a certain proportion to the sins committed—penances which are neither so heavy as to be intolerable or impossible, nor so light as to give the penitent an undue and imperfect idea of the gravity of sin, or to render the confessor an accomplice in the sins of others by excessive leniency in apportioning penances.

Now, I ask: Have the penances now imposed any proportion to the sins for which they are imposed? Is it not true that confessors are more inclined to indulgence than to severity on this point? Whether it is because they fear that by imposing heavy penances they will only afford penitents new occasions of sin by neglecting their penances; or whether it is that they are afraid of making the sacrament burthensome and distasteful, the fact at any rate is that they are accustomed to assign very light penances for very grievous sins. What connexion or proportion is there between innumerable sins of impurity, drunkenness, cursing, blasphemy, injustice, revealed in the tribunal of Penance on the one hand, and a few daily prayers or acts of mortification imposed as penance on the other hand? Can we imagine that a few easy practices such as these are sufficient satisfaction for as many sins; that a few brief moments of prayer are a sufficient compensation for whole years passed in every kind of sin? If satisfaction in itself is really a substitute for the eternal punishment which is condoned by God; if its object is to repair as far as possible the injury done Him; is it not clear that penance is not so light a task as is often imagined?

Besides this, whatever be the penance imposed by the confessor, how can we be certain that it is proportioned to our sins? Can we know the exact amount of our debts to divine justice, or the exact value in the eyes of God of the penance enjoined on us? Until we do we can never be certain of having fully settled our accounts with God. We may indeed flatter ourselves we have done much, but it is also most probable that much still remains to be done. Hence the evident necessity of not resting satisfied with the little that is imposed on us by the priest, but of adding voluntarily penances of our own if we do not wish to remain debtors to divine justice.

And what means can we use to supply for the insufficiency of sacramental penance? Let us see.

Spontaneous or voluntary penance can be practised in every state or condition, simply because the variety of penitential acts by which to practise it are almost infinite. Not that all these acts and exercises are applicable to each and every case; but because amongst them there will certainly be found some that are within the reach of every class of person. Spiritual writers reduce all penitential practices to three classes—prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds. Under the name of prayer are comprised all the acts that pertain to the virtue of religion, such, for instance, as Mass, sacraments, sermons, pious reading, visits to the church, and all kinds of prayer both mental and vocal; by fasting they understand all kinds of mortification both interior and exterior; and by alms-deeds all acts of mercy both spiritual and corporal.

These three classes of satisfaction are in direct opposition to the three great passions enumerated by St. John: *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life*;[1] and as contraries are remedied by contraries, it follows that each one, as the Council of Trent lays down, should prefer and select from amongst these three sorts of penances that which is more directly opposed to his predominant passion. If, for instance, your predominant passion is impurity, you should have recourse to abstinence and fasting with which the flesh is mortified and brought under subjection; if it is avarice, the remedy will be found in alms and works of mercy; if pride, you must turn to prayer and pious exercises, so as to humble yourself before God. In this way your penances will not only serve to expiate your past sins, but will also help to preserve you from future sins; for in opposing to our predominant vice the practice of the contrary virtue, we gradually destroy that sinful source, that evil principle, which if neglected could hardly fail to lead us on to sin afresh.

As it may happen that the particular penance which would under ordinary circumstances be the best remedy for our disease is incompatible with the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves, God permits and accepts one penance in place of another, and is content provided some penance is offered to Him in satisfaction for our sins; and certainly amongst these three classes of penance it will not be difficult to find several to suit all conditions and temperaments. Thus if your occupations do not permit you to devote much time to prayer, they do not thereby hinder you from mortifying yourself by fast and abstinence; if the state of your health does not permit you to fast it does not thereby hinder exercises of piety and charity. Thus it is that one kind of penance makes up for another. Jesus Christ prescribes penance for all, but among the innumerable works of penance that are possible He does not prescribe one rather than another—He leaves all to our own choice. If you really have the will to practise penance you will readily find several penances perfectly suitable to your case.

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[1] 1 John ii. 16.

This is not all; if those penitential practices which the masters of the spiritual life call *positive* are not feasible in your case, there are other practices called *negative*, which consist in the retrenchment of certain pleasures or attractions which in themselves are absolutely sinless. A hundred pleasant things—food, play, society—allure and attract and surround you on every side; now why not occasionally make a sacrifice of these to God?

Again; do not the duties that occupy you in the world daily cause you many trials and anxieties, and afford ceaseless cause of complaint and lamentation? Now, does not all this furnish you with copious and most acceptable opportunities of penance, if you patiently bear the burthens of your state in life in expiation of your sins?

Besides the duties and anxieties of your state in life there are the frequent crosses, tribulations, and adversities arising on the one hand from the actions of your fellow-men, such for instance as persecution, calumny, contention, injustice; and on the other hand from unavoidable sources, such as suffering, sickness, and the cruel hand of death pressing on those you hold dear—trials and sorrows from which no one is exempt in this vale of tears. Now, as the Council of Trent observes, so great is the goodness of God that He deigns to accept in payment of our faults all these miseries, no matter how inevitable they may be, provided only we accept and bear them in the spirit of penance. Instead, then, of giving way to lamentation and rage, how much better would it not be to humble ourselves under the hand of God who justly afflicts us, and to say to Him: Justly do we suffer all this because we have sinned. It is owing to a mysterious dispensation of Providence that these trials befall us—it is God Himself who imposes these penances on us. Let us submissively receive them from His hands; and since we must in any event suffer them, let us at least profit by them to expiate our sins and pay the debts we owe Him.

Do not, therefore, object that you find penance impossible or impracticable. Nay, have we not abundant means open to each and every one of us—the only thing that is required is the will to practise it—there is no need to speak of hair-shirts, or scourging, or corporal punishments. Let us rather say, and with more truth, that it is the will alone that is wanting. We are unwilling to bear the least suffering, we are enemies of every kind of penance, and it matters little to us that God will exact payment from us in the other world, if we do not pay our debts in this. What blindness! what weary days shall we not have to spend in the torments of Purgatory it we do not make good provision now while we have time!

Here on earth we think little or nothing of the punishments God will inflict on us one day; and we imagine we have done quite enough if we return to Him by a humble confession after having gravely offended Him. And once our confession is over we quickly forget all about our sins and regard them as completely expiated, without ever troubling our heads about any such thing as satisfaction. But in the life to come we shall recognize the rigour with which divine justice enacts the payment of what is due; then indeed shall we understand, but only too late, how much more it would have been to our advantage to pay out debts here below, since fasting, alms-deeds, trials—nay even a headache borne patiently in this world for the love of God, and in satisfaction for our sins—assume a sort of infinite value through their union with the merits of Jesus Christ, and become capable of paying a much greater debt than could be paid by several years of Purgatory.

But if, from our neglect of the works of penance in this life, we had nothing else but Purgatory to face in the next, our conduct would perhaps be excusable. But Purgatory is far from all we have to fear—we have to fear the danger of falling lower, of being damned and lost for all eternity; and this for two very good reasons which I beseech you to consider carefully: (1) Because the neglect of works of satisfaction is a clear proof that we have but little sorrow for the past; and (2) Because it constitutes a new source of sin for the future.

1. If the sorrow you bring with you to the sacred tribunal is a genuine sorrow, it will not completely disappear and cease with the sacrament itself. Of its very nature it is lasting, like to a deep wound which does not quickly close up. Now, if lasting, it cannot but lead you to bring forth worthy fruits of penance. The memory of the serious injuries done to God, the goodness with which He has deigned to grant you pardon of them, unworthy and undeserving though you may be, the care He has taken to hold it forth to you even before you had received it,—all this should form a powerful motive to induce you to take vengeance on yourself for the offences you have offered to God, and to take against yourself the measures demanded by His divine justice. This is what was done by the penitents mentioned in Sacred Scripture and Church history—David, Magdalen, Peter, and ever so many others. While life remained they ceased not to do penance for their sins, even though already well assured of pardon. With how much greater reason should not their example be imitated

by us who are far from having the same certainty of pardon as was accorded to them.

You may, perhaps, remark that these are examples of penance altogether above the average specimen of human nature. I readily grant it; but you also must grant that there is a very great difference between much and nothing. Do you imagine that because these sublime proofs of rigorous penance, of which they have left us so many examples, are not demanded of you, that consequently you are bound to nothing, neither to much nor to little?—no vigilance, no mortification, no penance, no self-denial, no attempt at abstinence, no thought of self-privation; but, on the contrary, continual attention to your own ease, a continual thirst for every attainable new pleasure without passing over as much as a single one—your life an endless round of vanity, amusements, dissipation? Now, if all this is the case, what, I repeat, are we to think of that sorrow not a trace of which remains after confession, and which does not in the least hinder you from being perfectly content with yourself and with the state of your soul, just as if nothing had happened and as if you had not carried before the sacred tribunal a countless multitude of sins? Assuredly this is a point that calls for the most serious reflection.

2. But the worst of all is that the neglect of penance gives rise to a gloomy outlook with reference to the future. I do not now consider penance merely in its relation to past sins that call for expiation, but in its bearing on those sins that may or can be committed in the future. Now, I say that penance is necessary to preserve us from falling again, and to fortify us against the extreme facility with which we fall once more into those sins that have been pardoned us. It is, as the Council of Trent says, "the custodian of our future life"—another powerful motive warning us not to limit ourselves to those few prayers and pious practices that are imposed on us by the confessor.

Your confession is over, and let us suppose it has been well made. Your sins consequently are cancelled; but are the effects of those sins cancelled also? Certainly not—all does not end with the confession itself. Your condition is not unlike that of a man rising from his bed of sickness after a long and severe illness. His illness is over, and he may be regarded as recovered, yet he still retains the consequences and traces of his illness—prostration, want of appetite, difficulty in digestion, in sleeping, in walking, and so on. His condition while not precisely that of an invalid is, on the other hand, not that of perfect health—the smallest effort, the least imprudence, exposes him to the danger of succumbing once more.

Thus also does it happen when you are reconciled to God in the tribunal of Penance after an unregulated and sinful life. Your sins are cancelled; you are restored to health; but the consequences of your sins still continue just like the smoking remains of fire only recently extinguished; there still remains great difficulty in doing that good you had not been accustomed to do previously; there still remains a strong inclination to evil, in the thousand ugly pictures called up by the imagination and memory—fruits of your previous sinful and foolish life; there still remains great weakness in conquering temptations to which you have been accustomed to succumb; there still remains, in fine, all the force of evil habits and inclinations that have hitherto been bound up with the record of your life. Now, although your sins are pardoned, how easy it would be for their injurious consequences to drag you back into your previous life of disorder and sin? How, then, can you hope to withstand all this, if not by the constant exercise of Christian penance which leads you to have recourse to God by fervent prayer, guard your senses diligently, practise fasting or mortification at least to some extent, and renounce all those things which though lawful in themselves are very dangerous for you?

If the bare natural tendency and inclination to evil, which is common to all mankind, obliges even the holiest and most innocent souls to watch over themselves jealously and carefully, and if they have no other means than penance to preserve the precious treasure and beauty of their innocence, how much more is this not binding on you who have strengthened a hundred times the force of this unhappy tendency by your evil habits?

Yet this very simple truth is one that many penitents will not understand. As soon as they have laid their sins at the feet of the priest they at once regard themselves as completely and perfectly healed, and they use no precaution, mortification, or care; they simply act as if they had nothing to fear and as if they had never been ill. Now this is precisely the reason why they have no constancy and strength in the grace they have received; hence the continued series of falls; hence the continued round of sins and repentance, repentance and sin, ending finally in perdition. And the result will be always the same as long as you neglect or refuse to consider and treat yourself for what you really are—one just recovered from illness, still weak and convalescent, devoid of strength and courage, and consequently in need of great care and attention.

Be not deceived; it is morally impossible to preserve ourselves from falling, without the requisite exercise of Christian penance. Let us do penance because we have sinned and are bound to make reparation to God for the injury we have done Him; let us do penance to prove we have true contrition; but above all let us do penance to preserve ourselves from sin, and to destroy the evil impressions left in us by our past sins: *Unless you shall do penance,* says our Lord, *you shall all likewise perish.*[1] He does not speak of that interior and heartfelt penance only which destroys sin; but He also speaks of exterior penance, and of the good works by which we make satisfaction for the punishment we have deserved, and by which we destroy the evil consequences that lead us to sin afresh. This penance, He tells us, is necessary to us all to keep us from perishing—it is necessary to the innocent to defend and preserve the treasure of their innocence; it is necessary to sinners to obtain the grace of repentance and change of life; it is necessary to penitents to strengthen them in grace. All of us, then, no matter who we are, and no matter what our condition may be, must lay hold of this plank of penance, without which our shipwreck is certain and inevitable: *Unless you shall do penance you shall all likewise perish.*

The truth I have thus set forth is one of the most important in Catholic teaching and practice; but it is also one of the most neglected in the world. Practise it then, faithfully and constantly, if you desire to lead a good Christian life, and die a holy Christian death.

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[1] Luke xiii. 3.

Thirty-fourth Instruction on the Sacraments

INDULGENCES

THERE is no doctrine or practice of the Catholic Church that has been and is so often and so bitterly attacked as the Catholic doctrine and practice of Indulgences; and, on the other hand, there are few words or practices more familiar to a Catholic. You will not find a single prayer-book or book of devotion in which the word does not occur over and over again, just as you will find that there are very few pious practices to which the Church has not attached Indulgences. Thus the first pious practice that is taught by the mother to the child at her knee—I mean the sign of the Cross—has been enriched by an Indulgence; and throughout all the years of that child's life the Church holds out her treasury of Indulgences to him, and in the last great moment when he is about to face his God, she tells him that if he only repeats the sweet name of Jesus with contrite and humble heart, a full and perfect Indulgence will wipe out every debt he owes to God, and enable him to enter at once into the possession of the Beatific Vision, and of the unending bliss of Paradise. Nay, this is not all—she further teaches him that if that debt has not been paid by him during life, and if he has in consequence to undergo the purifying pains of Purgatory, the indulgenced prayers and pious exercises offered for him by those on earth will help to pay that debt, shorten his punishment and enable him to enter into Heaven sooner than he otherwise could.

Obviously, then, the doctrine of Indulgences demands attentive consideration in a course of instructions, and as the doctrine is intimately connected with that of Satisfaction, this is the proper place to speak of the subject. Accordingly, the present instruction shall be devoted to Indulgences.

The bitter and frequent attacks made by the enemies of the Catholic Church on this particular point renders it necessary for us to dwell at some length on the Church's teaching concerning Indulgences.

Now, what are we bound to believe with reference to Indulgences? This:—

(*a*) That the punishment due to sin is two-fold—eternal and temporal;

(*b*) That when God forgives the sin, He always remits the eternal punishment;

(*c*) But that He may, and indeed ordinarily does, reserve a certain debt of temporal punishment;

(*d*) That the sinner must pay this debt either in this life or in the life to come;

(*e*) That this payment is made by penitential works;

(*f*) That the penitential works may be relaxed or modified or changed into other pious exercises by the properly constituted authority;

(*g*) That this authority is the Catholic Church, and that the Catholic Church possesses the power to modify or relax or change or determine the extent of temporal punishments, and that this power was conferred by our Lord;

(*h*) That the exercise of this power is nothing more or less than the Catholic doctrine and practice of Indulgences, an Indulgence being nothing more or less than the remission by the Church of the debt of temporal punishment that is due to sin and that remains still unpaid;

(*i*) And that by an Indulgence lawfully granted and properly obtained, the penitent accomplishes precisely the same effect as was accomplished in the early ages of the Church by long and severe penitential exercises.

Much of what has just been said has been already explained in the instructions on Satisfaction; but one all important point requires attention, and that is the statement that the Church possesses the power to grant Indulgences.

That the power to relax or remit the temporal punishment due to sin, in other words, that the power to grant Indulgences was given to the Church, is clearly inferred from our Lord's own words, when He said to St. Peter: *Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven.*[1] In these words is given to the Chief Pastor of the Church the ample and unlimited power of loosing or freeing the faithful from all and everything that could hinder them from going to heaven provided they were anxious to go there and provided they were ready to comply with the requisite conditions. Now, there are only two things that can hinder a soul from going to heaven—the guilt of sin and the temporal punishment due to sin; and consequently, we must hold that the words of our Lord conferred the power of freeing from the temporal punishment due to sin no less than from the sin itself.

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[1] Matt. xvi. 19.

Not alone did the Church possess the power of granting Indulgences, but she exercised it in various ways from the very beginning and all down through the course of the ages. Of this we find a striking instance in the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. The city of Corinth had of old borne an evil reputation for the evil-doing and immorality of its inhabitants. Their conversion to Christianity did not all at once succeed in shaking off the force of long-standing habits, and offenders against chastity and morality were far from being few amongst the Christians of Corinth. Such a state of things could not but sadden the heart of the Apostle St. Paul. He wrote to them ; he visited them ; he besought them ; he tried every means that Christian gentleness and charity could suggest to save them from their sins ; nor did he omit to point out the severe measures that would be taken were the evil complained of to continue. It did continue, and severe punishment was inflicted where necessary. One unfortunate man, who had been guilty of grave sin, was so afflicted by this punishment, and showed such evident signs of grief and sorrow for his crimes, that his fellow-Christians of Corinth besought St. Paul to remit the penance that had been enjoined on the unfortunate sinner. He yielded to their entreaties, and wrote to them that moved by their prayers he granted the desired remission, and that he did so in the person or authority of Jesus Christ. Nor was this remission a mere relaxation or remission of the punishment the man had to undergo in the eyes of men, but it must also be regarded as availing in the sight of God ; for it had been inflicted to save the sinner's soul, and this being so, we may be quite certain that the Apostle would not relax it if his relaxation was not ratified and accepted by God.

The practice of relaxing the punishment inflicted on sinners in consideration of the prayers of the faithful, was continued after the Apostles had gone to their reward, and we find evidence of it in every period. In what precisely this practice consisted may be learned from events that occurred in the life of St. Cyprian, the great Bishop of Carthage, and as these events shed an interesting light on the Christian life of those days I shall turn aside for a moment and devote a few moments to St. Cyprian.

Born in Africa about the year 200, of a rich family, a man of energy, force of character, and rare talents, he was while yet a young man raised to high offices in the service of the State. It was only in 246 that he was converted to Christianity, and so high was the character he bore, and so sincere did his conversion seem, that he was at once admitted to the service of the altar, and within two years, in the year 248, he was elected Archbishop of Carthage and Primate of the Church in Africa. Ten years later, in the general persecution of the Church under Valerian, he freely gave his life for Christ, and was beheaded on September 14, 258, and the martyred saint went, as he himself said, to meet the goodly company of the prophets, the glorious choir of the Apostles, the countless multitude of holy martyrs.

Now a point that deserves special mention in connexion with his long and important episcopal career of ten years is the jealous, almost obstinate, care he took to guard the Catholic faith from the slightest taint of error or unauthorized teaching; and consequently, with one single exception, no doctrine or practice recommended or sanctioned by him can be regarded as foreign to the principles of the Gospel—a consideration that is of still greater weight when it is remembered that he lived and taught and ruled within a hundred and fifty years from the time of the Apostles.

What, then, was his opinion and what his practice regarding the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin? In order to answer this question satisfactorily, it will be necessary to refer to the existence and infliction of canonical or public penances in the early ages of the Church. Something has been said on the subject in previous instructions, but not enough for our present purpose.

Long before his day public penances, of the strictest character, often extending over several years, were imposed on those who were guilty of grave sins. Those penances were determined according to fixed rules or canons, and hence their name *canonical*—each class of public sin having a definite public penance attached to it, which penance had to be performed before the penitent could be admitted to the ordinary privileges enjoyed by the rest of the faithful. For instance, a person who had given up or denied his faith was obliged to do penance for ten years; one who made an irreverent use of God's name had to fast for fifteen days on bread and water; ten days' fast was imposed on those who were guilty of laughing or talking during divine service; while one who cursed his parents was condemned to a like penance for forty days.

Now more than a century previous to St. Cyprian's time there existed the practice of mitigating or condoning these public penances in certain special conditions. Thus: during those first centuries, as indeed ever since, the Church looked with special affection and consideration on those of her children, and they were far from being few, who had suffered or were about to suffer for the faith. Some of these lay in prison awaiting the call of the executioner; others had been in that position when some amnesty was proclaimed, or some other special reason led to their release; but whether they were in prison awaiting death, or whether the danger was already passed and gone, the Church ever considered they had deserved well, and that their merits and intercession were entitled to particular respect and deference. She displayed her attitude towards them in a very practical and remarkable way—by remitting the canonical penance in the case of those penitents who were able to produce a written recommendation or request to that effect from one of the martyrs ; and so common had the practice become that St. Cyprian, whose views of life and duty were, owing to the special circumstances of his training, unusually severe, regarded it as being carried too far, and felt himself bound to publish a warning to those entitled to give the recommendation in question. " I entreat you," he wrote, " to make yourselves acquainted with the dispositions of those penitents, and to satisfy yourselves that their contrition and humiliation approaches as near as possible to complete and prefect satisfaction." He does not, it will be noted, condemn the practice— he merely considers it is sometimes carried too far.

Nor indeed is it seriously denied by anyone that this practice existed in St. Cyprian's time. What is asserted is, that the purpose of this remission was merely to relax penitents from the long and severe public penances they had to perform ; while it is altogether denied that this remission was of any avail to free the penitent from the debt of temporal punishment he owed to God. Now what was St. Cyprian's opinion on the point, and surely he knew the true teaching of faith ? Listen to his own words : " The Lord," he wrote, " is able mercifully to pardon him who repents, who labours, who prays; He is also able to set down to his account (or place to his credit) whatever the martyrs have asked and the bishops have done for such a person." Not alone, as you will notice, does he hold that the Church may remit canonical penances at the request of the martyrs ; but he states as clear as noonday that the Lord accepts the merits of the martyrs and places them to the credit of the penitents ; and thus that the remission not only releases from the punishment inflicted by men, but also that which the sinner should have to pay in the sight of God.

Then Church, then, has power and authority to help the penitent to pay the debt of temporal punishment he owes to God for his sins. Now in paying that debt for the penitent, what fund does the Church draw on ? On the merits and satisfactions of Christ and the saints. The reason is clear. Temporal punishment can be remitted only by suitable satisfaction or works of penance. Now we know that the satisfaction made by Christ our Lord was infinite and superabundunt ; we also know that the merits of the Blessed Virgin were superabundant; we also may be quite sure that many of the saints and pious souls in every age and clime did works of satisfaction far above what they were called on to pay. Now, what has become of all these superabundant merits and satisfactions? This: they remain at the Church's disposal, constitute the Church's treasury, and are the fund on which the Church draws when she desires to help the penitent to make satisfaction for his sins.

Now, if the Church has this treasury, this fund, at her disposal she clearly has the power to draw on it, and apply it in greater or less extent, according to the particular circumstances of time and place and person. Hence, when applying it in a particular case, she can do so to such an extent as to make up completely for the debt of temporal punishment due by the person to whom she applies it, and this is what is known as a plenary or complete or full Indulgence; or she may apply it only to a limited extent, in which case she is said to grant a partial Indulgence. To express it in another way, the Church, by a plenary Indulgence, delivers us from all the debt of temporal punishment we owe to God for our sins; while by a partial Indulgence, which is usually stated as an Indulgence of a certain number of days or years, she delivers us from precisely the same quantity of the debt of temporal punishment as would have been paid by the old public penances extending over a corresponding period. The practical difference between the two classes of Indulgences is best seen in their results. Were we to die after having gained a plenary Indulgence, we should go straight to heaven without having to pass through Purgatory; while a partial Indulgence would indeed lessen the time of our punishment, but would not free us completely from Purgatory. This consideration is quite enough to let us see the value we should set on Indulgences, the care and anxiety we should have to gain as many of them as we can; and all the more so as some Indulgences can be applied to the relief of the suffering souls in Purgatory—and who is there now on earth who can be certain that friends and loved ones who were once dear to him and to whom he is still bound by the claims of friendship to hold out a helping hand, do not now stand in need of his prayers, and of the cup of cold water that God in His goodness has so copiously left ready at our hands?

Hence it is clear how important it is for us to have an accurate idea of the conditions necessary to gain Indulgences—for it need not be observed that while the Church is the dispenser of the mysteries of God, she cannot and does not dispense these mysteries at random but takes full account of the dispositions of the penitent and the circumstances of time and place in which he lives.

The first condition she demands in those who wish to gain an

Indulgence is the state of grace, which, of course, presupposes freedom from all mortal sin. The reason is that as an Indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, it would be absurd to expect that remission as long as the eternal punishment has not been remitted, and that punishment is not remitted as long as the soul is not in a state of grace. Hence, as a general rule the first condition for gaining an Indulgence will be a good Confession; not that all the exercises or works to which the Indulgence is attached need follow confession and the state of grace; but that the soul be in a state of grace on the final completion of these works. This condition of sacramental Confession, it should be observed, does not as a rule apply to partial Indulgences, to gain which an act of perfect contrition suffices.

The second condition consists in the faithful and personal and devout fulfilment of the particular works the Church lays down in order to gain the particular Indulgence, with due regard to the regulations as to time and place and object as far as they are regulated in the concession of the Indulgence. Hence, if the works themselves, or a considerable part of them, or any of the prescribed conditions of time or place happen to be omitted, no matter what the excuse, the Indulgence is not gained.

The third condition requisite is to have at least the general intention of gaining Indulgences, and hence it is an excellent practice to renew every morning the intention to gain all the Indulgences possible during the course of the day.

Thus far regarding the conditions necessary for the gaining of any and every Indulgence. But to gain a plenary Indulgence more definite regulations are, as a rule, laid down and demanded. These are: Confession, Communion, a visit to a church and the recitation of certain prayers. I have said *as a rule*, because there are several exceptions, especially with reference to Confession, and these must depend altogether on the nature of the Indulgence and the terms on which it is granted.

In like manner, the visit to a church is not always necessary; but when it is prescribed it should be made in the time and way laid down for the gaining of the Indulgence; and it is important to note that the visit can be made before or after the discharge of the other pious exercises requisite for gaining the Indulgence. And should a person desire to gain several plenary Indulgences the same day, it will be necessary to make a separate visit for each Indulgence. It will, however, suffice to go outside the church and return after a moment or two. Furthermore, it should be noted that this condition of a visit to a church can be changed by the priest into some other pious exercise in the case of the sick and infirm or otherwise unable to leave their houses.

Regarding the prayers to be recited in order to gain an Indulgence, these prayers are, as a rule, to be offered for certain special objects. These objects are the propagation of the true religion, the exaltation of the Church, the conversion of sinners, peace and concord amongst Christian nations, and the extirpation of heresy. These various intentions need not be dwelt on separately or explicitly—it will be always enough to offer the prayers according to the intention of the Pope. What and how many prayers are to be said on such occasions has not been laid down ; but five *Our Fathers* will always be quite sufficient.

These, then, are the general conditions usually demanded for the gaining of a plenary Indulgence—conditions which, however, are sometimes dispensed with, and occasionally are not demanded at all. But, in order to gain a plenary Indulgence in all its fullness, there is one condition that admits of no exception whatever, and that is the detestation of all sins, both mortal and venial, and a complete spirit of detachment from all affection to any and every kind of sin. This condition accentuates two important points—the first is the utterly unfounded nature of the charge often made by Protestants to the effect that an Indulgence is a permission to commit sin, or a price paid for sin ; the second is the great attention that should be devoted to frequent attempts to make an act of perfect contrition.

Most Indulgences are said to be applicable to the souls in Purgatory. There is, however, a very important difference between Indulgences gained by the living for themselves and Indulgences offered by them for the souls in Purgatory. For instance, a person who fulfils all the conditions requisite for gaining a plenary Indulgence, certainly does gain it, and it certainly does produce in him all its fruit which is to discharge the full debt of temporal punishment he owes to the justice of God, and hence were he to die immediately after having gained such an Indulgence, it is absolutely certain that he would go straight to heaven without having to pass through the fires of Purgatory. In other words it is certain that God accepts, and so to say is bound to accept, the compensation offered by the Indulgences in question, simply because He has certainly given authority to His Church to grant the Indulgence to her children. But this certainty does not exist in the case of Indulgences applied to the souls in Purgatory. The Church has no direct authority over them, and all she can do is to offer Indulgences to God for them, begging Him to accept them in satisfaction for their sins, and such Indulgences will at once assist those souls for whom they are offered, provided God deigns to accept them. All we can say is, that the faithful on earth can apply their satisfaction for the suffering souls in Purgatory and that such satisfactions are very useful and serviceable to them, and have always been considered to be such by the Church. Hence it will be clear how highly it is recommended to the living to hold out this help to the dead, and thus contribute to hasten their release from the tortures of Purgatory.

It would, of course, be impossible to enumerate all the various Indulgences that are granted by the Church ; but the principal of these will be found set forth in the ordinary prayer-books, or will be announced from the altar from time to time when occasion offers.

And now to conclude ; sinners as we are, and therefore debtors to divine justice, let us have recourse to this treasure, let us apply to this heavenly source of help and comfort, let us be always on the watch to gain Indulgences, by the faithful performance of the conditions laid down by the Church, the custodian of God's treasury.

How good is God ; how sweet His contrivances ! He pursues sin with perfect hatred ; He exacts the last farthing, the full satisfaction of the debt arising from sin. He does so of necessity—He could not be God were it otherwise ; but as for the poor sinner, the bountiful Lord loves him still, and on the single condition of a slight vengeance He facilitates his acquittal and puts in his hand the price of his ransom —*Mercy and truth have met each other ; justice and peace have kissed.*

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[1] Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

Thirty-fifth Instruction on the Sacraments

FREQUENT CONFESSION

From all that has been said in previous instructions it will be clear what and how precious are the effects of the sacrament of Penance. It confers sanctifying grace ; it remits all mortal sins, and even all venial sins that are confessed with true sorrow ; it changes the eternal punishment due to sin into a temporal punishment which is also remitted in a greater or less degree according to the character of the penitent's dispositions ; it restores the merits of the good works that were performed before the commission of mortal sin ; it affords opportune helps to the soul to enable it to avoid falling into sin again ; and finally it bestows peace and tranquillity of conscience.

This being so, the utility and advisability of frequent confession follow as a matter of course. Yet only too often do we find that while many are regular in attending Mass, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, and practising other works of piety, they are far from displaying the same zeal or regularity in approaching the sacred tribunal of Penance ; and hence I am compelled to devote a special instruction to the importance and advantages of frequent confession. In order to succeed the better, I shall, first of all, point out the sad effects of remaining away from confession, and after that I shall dwell on the salutary effects of a frequent good confession.

1. The first effect of remaining away for a long time from confession is to increase the danger of making a sacrilegious confession when the sinner does at length approach the sacred tribunal—the longer confession is deferred the greater will be the difficulty in making it properly.

Thus, there is greater difficulty in the matter of examination of conscience—an examination which must be very accurate, and which must extend not only to the bad deeds that may have been committed, and which are easily recognized, but also to sins in word, thought, omission, and affection. Now it is quite clear that the longer the interval, the greater will be the difficulty in remembering all that —nay, it will come to this, that it will be almost impossible to know where to begin the search for the countless deeds, and words, and thoughts, and omissions contrary to the law of God.

You may say that the Lord does not bind you to confess absolutely all the sins you have committed, but those only which you are able to call to mind after a careful examination. Quite true; but the point is: do you make this examination with a care and diligence proportionate to the long interval that has elapsed, and to the number and nature of your sins? As an examination such as this is a matter of no light difficulty, so it usually happens that it is superficial and insufficient—an insufficiency which as a rule involves the absence of the integrity requisite to the proper accusation of sins, and renders the confession imperfect, confused, and unmethodical.

Greater also will be the difficulty in the matter of contrition—the longer sin dwells in the soul the more does the feeling of sorrow and detestation become dimmed. As a result of keeping your conscience loaded with sin, and of being familiarized with it, you find greater difficulty in detesting it; you no longer regard it as the abomination it really is, and your attitude towards it resembles that of children who at first sight of a dog run away in fear and terror, but becoming habituated to see him everyday before their eyes, lose all sense of fear, and even go so far ere long as to caress him and embrace him, and show their delight in him in a thousand ways.

What has been said of contrition applies equally to the purpose of amendment, which grows more difficult from day to day for those who preserve sin in their hearts for a long time, and who consequently become more inclined to sin and habituated to sin, and who daily become more and more its slaves—all of which is directly contrary to the generous resolution of sinning no more that is requisite to obtain pardon.

It may, then, very easily come to pass that, after having by so long a delay contracted a close affection and alliance with sin, you might come to regard it lightly even on those rare occasions on which you venture to approach the tribunal of Penance. And this is actually what does happen in the case of many and many a sinner—they approach the sacrament with a frozen heart, with indifferent contrition, with lukewarm purpose of amendment, with an utter distaste for all remedies, and hence with little or none of the dispositions requisite for the proper reception of the sacrament. I appeal to the experience, to the intimate conviction, of those who are in this condition. Is it not true that at the moment in which you approach the sacred tribunal you find within yourselves a certain element of coldness and indifference, and almost a secret disinclination to receive the sacrament properly? Alas! it is only too true.

To the difficulties just mentioned should be added another which concerns the confessor, or which arises in consequence of the inopportune moment selected by such penitents for their confessions. As they are unwilling to be known as they really are, and as they cannot bear to have their consciences exposed too clearly to view, they usually make it a point to go to confession when there is a great crowd in the midst of which they take their place. But what happens ? The confessor, because of the number around him, cannot spend much time in putting questions, nor in suggesting those reflections that a case such as this would under ordinary circumstances demand. Hence all is over in a few seconds ; but while the confessor cannot, in view of the crowd that surround his confessional, do all that the state of your case would demand, is it not true that this very fact may contribute to your receiving the sacrament with less fruit or with no fruit at all ?

Everything, then, goes to show that the longer confession is deferred the more difficult it becomes ; and the more it is postponed the stronger grows the inclination to postpone it. Just like a debtor who is able to pay his debt, but who does not do so—the longer he defers paying, the more does his will to pay diminish ; in the same way the longer one puts off confession the more does the will to confess diminish. The day or the occasion marked out for confession comes and goes, and the confession is not made—the slightest obstacle that presents itself is seized on as an excuse to put it off still further. It is always thus in case of those things which people feel bound to do, but which they do unwillingly. And why unwillingly ? Because the longer they procrastinate the greater the difficulties to be encountered.

2. But let us suppose that as a result of putting off confession no danger is likely to arise of making it badly, yet at the very least the penitent's conversion is always less durable, and hence the second evil effect arising from confession long delayed is the danger of relapsing again into sin.

This danger arises from the evil habits that are contracted and nourished by remaining aloof from the sacrament of Penance. And in fact what care and trouble are not required to regain and pursue the right path after an unregulated and licentious life ! During the long interval between one confession and another your soul is like a neglected field that is covered with weeds and briars and thorns—it becomes covered over with the innumerable sins that spring up, and grow and take deep root. To pluck up all these weeds and to renounce the sins that have so long made their home within your soul, you require more than ordinary care and attention—a care and attention which you either are not willing to spend, or even if you are, you tire ere long and finally abandon. This is the explanation of the relapses that follow so closely on confession—this accounts for the return to sin often witnessed the self-same day.

Such is the result of that foolish and senseless maxim that it is just as easy to confess several sins as it is to confess one sin, and consequently that it is just as well to multiply sins as much as one pleases. Fools ! do you not know, as I have already explained, that while confession does indeed cancel sin, it does not destroy its consequences ? It does not destroy the bad habit that enfeebles the soul and renders it ready to fall back into sin unless the greatest care is taken to avoid such a calamity. And as very few care to face those things that are difficult, so amongst those who go to confession rarely there are few who derive lasting fruits from the sacrament. And this is all the more true when it is borne in mind that with the lapse of time sorrow diminishes, good resolutions vanish, the consciousness of the presence of grace becomes dim and vague, and everything conspires to destroy the fruits and effects of the sacrament.

Is it not, then, a great evil that in confessing rarely, you expose yourself to the danger of making a bad confession, or at least of losing the fruits of your confession ?

Far different are the effects of frequent confession ; nor need I spend much time in proving this to you.

By frequent examination of conscience you come to have a better and more permanent knowledge of the state of your soul, of its imperfections, and failings ; and you do not need much time or trouble to be able to declare your sins accurately. Contrition that is frequently renewed remains keener in the heart and resolutions frequently repeated become more deeply impressed on the soul.

Besides, you have in frequent confession a powerful restraint against sin—the bare thought of having to present oneself very soon before the sacred tribunal is enough to keep you in the right path. You have also a powerful motive and help to practise virtue in these instructions and advice which the confessor suggests according to your needs. Above all, you have great helps towards perseverance, in those special graces conferred by the sacrament to afford strength and constancy to the soul. This point deserves special attention.

Every sacrament, as will be remembered, along with sanctifying grace, confers on the soul a second grace called sacramental grace, that is to say, a right to certain powerful helps destined to enable us to attain the particular object for which each sacrament was instituted. This being borne in mind it will be clear that as the object of the sacrament of Penance is the destruction of sin, it follows that besides cancelling past sins it infuses a vigour all its own as a remedy and preservative against sinning again. Not that it renders us impeccable all at once, but it helps us to become so, just like a medicine which when taken once gives relief, but which must be repeated to produce permanent results. This happy result is obtained by means of certain defensive and strengthening graces which God gives us to combat sin, conquer temptations, and bear us up against our own weakness. "Penance," says St. Thomas, "not only destroys past sins but preserves us from future sins."

Hence a sinner who has made a good confession may, without any presumption, expect from God not only the graces that are common and general, but also those graces that have as their special object the preservation of the friendship of God. It was our Lord's will to attach these graces to the sacrament of Penance, and you need not hope to find them elsewhere. If, then, you desire to obtain them you must have recourse to the source in which God has placed them: *You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains.*[1]

From this principle, three conclusions may be drawn: The first is, that the more frequent is confession the greater will be the influence of the graces and helps that are connected with it; just as, for an opposite reason, the rarer it is the less will be one's participation in these same graces and helps.

The second is, that to approach the tribunal of Penance you should not think of waiting till your soul is stained with mortal sin. Your conscience may indeed find no grave sin to reproach you with; but nevertheless you are liable to fall and you need to be strengthened against the natural downward tendency of our human nature. And who is not conscious of the fact that in the ordinary course of life there are days and times and moments of more than usual weakness and temptation? Oh! how many sins would be avoided if instead of allowing themselves to become utterly weak and debilitated, people would only have timely recourse to the remedy held out to them by Jesus Christ! In one word, if in the matter of bodily health you do not always await illness before having recourse to medicine, but prudently take it sometimes as a preventative, why should you not do likewise to promote the health of your soul?

The third is that frequent confession is necessary to all—to sinners to enable them to become virtuous; to the good to preserve them from becoming bad, and to help them to persevere and become better and better. Neither perfect conversion of heart nor perseverance in good depends on ourselves and our own resources, but on the grace of God; and the ordinary channel of these graces is precisely the sacrament of Penance.

You see, then, how important it is to frequent the sacrament of Penance, and how grossly they are deceived who look on its frequentation as a mere popular devotion fit only for females who are anxious to pass as devotees. The frequentation of the sacrament of Penance is as important as salvation itself; and salvation is an affair that concerns each and all without any exception whatever.

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[1] Is. xii. 3.

Do not, therefore, be deceived by certain statements that spring from the lips of some who may indeed be good and brave, according to the estimation of the world, but who when all is said and done are far from having a truly Christian spirit. "What is the good of confessing so often ?" they ask ; "the sacraments should be respected—they should not be treated so familiarly—to do so is to run the risk of sacrilege. These devotees who continually haunt the confessional are no better than others, if they are not actually worse."

Now, this is downright folly and stupidity. What is the good of confessing so often ? Why, I ask in return, do you wash yourself so frequently ? Is it not to keep yourself clean from every stain ? Now, if you have frequent recourse to water, and justly so, in order to preserve cleanliness of body, why criticise a similar practice to preserve cleanliness of soul, which is of far more importance ?

We must of course use the sacraments with respect ; but this respect does not consist in remaining away from them, but rather in approaching them with the requisite dispositions. True respect for a sacrament is always accompanied by the desire to receive it and by the efforts that are necessary to receive it properly. It is not the respect that keeps many away from the frequentation of the sacraments—it is simply their attachment to a life of sin that does so. They are well aware that the frequentation of the sacraments cannot stand side by side with the life they lead—with its vicious habits, with forbidden pleasures, with bad occasions of every kind; and hence they abandon the sacraments in order to avoid having to abandon sin. Is this respect ? or is it not rather a love of sin that will not be renounced ?

In the same way is not the fear that is alleged of committing sacrileges only a mere pretence ? Why speak of sacrileges at all in this connexion ? We never commit a sacrilege as long as we fear to commit it, as long as we are unwilling to commit it, and as long as we do our best to avoid committing it.

But is it true that those who do frequent the sacraments are no better than other people ? Certainly not ; the statement is a manifest falsehood. Experience makes it clear and evident to us, that they are as a rule the most prudent, the most chaste, and the most reliable persons we know. Doubtless they are not exempt from the failings and imperfections that are the sad inheritance of our nature, and from which we can never be entirely free as long as we are in this mortal body; but their failings are often enormously exaggerated by the world, which makes it its business to magnify them so as to justify its own want of devotion, by ridiculing and belittling the devotion of others. In any event their imperfections are not for a moment to be compared to the vices, and crimes, and abominations of every kind that are witnessed in those who remain away from the sacraments. The reason is clear—he who frequents the sacraments if he is not a perfect hypocrite, finds therein a powerful influence for good, or at least a powerful restraint against becoming bad; while he who remains aloof has no restraining force, and goes on from crime to crime till he finishes up with the utmost excesses.

I must not, however, be taken to deny the possibility of abuses on the part of those who frequent the sacraments out of habit or custom; but it would be utterly false to conclude therefrom that it is better to remain away. No number of abuses can remove the value, the excellence, and the advantages of confession. Let us, then, destroy the abuse which is our own work alone; but let us retain the frequent practice of confession, which is holy and salutary for all. Common experience proves this—if a pious and God-fearing person is surprised by a sudden death, you at once say: "The Lord found him well prepared, because he was accustomed to frequent the sacraments;" but if the person thus cut off is one who has been away a long time from confession, you shrug your shoulders, and say, if not with the lips, at least in your heart: "How sad! what a wretched end!"

Now, what are we to conclude from all this? If we value our salvation, let us have frequent recourse to the saving waters of Penance, and we shall find therein a sure remedy against our past sins, and a powerful antidote against all sins for the future.

Above all, never put off confession when you find yourself in mortal sin—great are the misfortunes to which you would expose yourself by so doing. The loss of the many good works you may do while in that miserable state, the danger of being surprised by a sudden death, the evil habit which you thus contract and which renders your conversion more difficult and less lasting—all these considerations should determine you never to remain in that state, but to escape it as soon as you can, according to the oft-repeated warning of the Holy Ghost: *Delay not to be converted to the Lord.*[1]

It is not precisely the commission of the sin itself that causes the loss of souls—it is rather the continuance in sin that usually ends in abusing the sacrament and rendering it useless.

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[1] Eccles v. 8.

If, after having stained your soul with mortal sin, you go at once to cleanse it by means of a good confession, you will secure your eternal salvation, and sin will not be able to spread its roots deeply; not yet blind and hard of heart, but still tender and sensible to the impressions of grace you will approach the sacrament worthily. Promptitude, then, in recovering after a grave fall should be your first duty, your most anxious thought.

But if a good confession suffices to restore us to a state of grace, it is not enough to confirm us in the grace we have received unless we are careful to make it frequently. For though the sacrament gives the penitent many helps against falling again, yet it confers these gifts according to a certain measure, just like food which supplies strength and vigour, but only for a certain limited period. To heal Naaman of his leprosy, the Prophet Eliseus directed him to bathe in the river Jordan, not one time alone, but seven times. This should be a lesson for us to cleanse ourselves over and over again in the waters of Penance if we wish to be completely purified from the leprosy of our sins.

Finally, let us reflect that it is a well-made confession that must decide our eternal lot in the hour of death; now a good confession at the hour of death is the fruit of frequent confession during life. Let us not flatter ourselves that we shall be able at that moment properly to accomplish that which we have done but rarely, and consequently imperfectly, during life.

Thirty-sixth Instruction on the Sacraments

GENERAL CONFESSION

Before concluding the instructions on the sacrament of Penance, I must not omit to dwell at some length on the subject of general confession.

Priests who are accustomed to hearing confessions have often an opportunity of noting a curious contradiction. Some penitents are ready at all times to make their confessions over again without any reason whatever ; while, on the contrary, others, and precisely those who stand in greatest need of making a general confession, will not dream of doing so. I now purpose to lay before you a few observations to enable you to know how to decide, each one in his own case.

On the subject of those confessions which are called general, because they embrace either our whole life, or a great part of it, three broad principles may be laid down. For some, these confessions are useless, if not injurious ; for others, they are absolutely necessary ; and for others while not precisely necessary they are extremely useful, and should not be neglected. Bearing these three classes of persons in mind, I will now point out the advantages of a general confession, as well as dispel the difficulties that sometimes prevent people from making it.

I have said, in the first place, that general confession is sometimes useless. Now, to whom ? To those who have already made one, and who have done so to the best of their ability, and who have no solid reasons for repeating it.

The reasons such persons usually bring forward for making a general confession are two—they fear they have not explained their sins sufficiently in their previous confessions, or they fear they did not have sufficient contrition. Now, as far as the first reason is concerned you should never forget that you are never bound to repeat your confessions as long as you have devoted reasonable care and attention to the making of them. If you do happen to discover that you had forgotten some sin in your previous confessions, it is quite enough to mention that fact in your next confession without in any way attempting a general confession

With regard to contrition you should bear in mind that a merely negative doubt—that is to say, the simple want of absolute and evident certainty—is no sufficient reason to inspire distrust of your previous confessions. God has so ordained that no one can be absolutely and perfectly certain he has had contrition and has obtained grace, in order that we may always remain in fear and humility; but it is enough for us to be able to form a prudent judgment that we have made our confessions sincerely—and of this sincerity we have an excellent proof in the hatred we bear to sin, and in our persevering in the state of grace.

For the rest, do not imagine that you are going to dispel all your doubts by frequent general confessions—you simply increase and multiply them. Like certain sores, the more you irritate them the more troublesome do they become—the more you disturb and irritate your conscience by repeating your confessions the more troubled and uneasy will you become; for the same uncertainty will always remain and the same fear that you have not made a good confession, that you have not told all your sins, that you had not the requisite dispositions.

All that I can advise, and all that you can do, is to trust confidently to God's mercy for the past, and to have undoubting hope in His goodness, not striving to surpass the limits He in His wisdom has fixed, nor expecting a certainty and evidence that He has not willed to grant us. The sins of the past should indeed be a source of continued regret, but not a continual subject of endless and tormenting examinations and discussions. All the more will this be the case when your confessor advises you not to be afraid and to think no more of the past—follow his advice, obey him blindly, and do not be obstinate in having your own way. Your obedience will free you from all sin in the sight of God, while disobedience and obstinacy are always culpable.

This, however, may not be your case; nor indeed is it the case to any great extent. In the majority of cases, general confession is either absolutely necessary, or at least highly advantageous.

First of all, it is necessary to those who are certain of having made bad confessions, or at least who have good grounds for doubt. And bear in mind that when I say bad confessions I do not mean those confessions only in which a sin has been wilfully concealed, as some penitents imagine, who, when advised by their confessor to make their confession over again, usually reply that it is useless and unnecessary because they do not remember having concealed any sin—as if confession can be bad in this way only! It must not be forgotten that many things are necessary for a good confession, and consequently that confession can be bad for many reasons besides that of having concealed or disguised a sin during confession.

(*a*) They can be bad in consequence of defective examination of conscience—an examination which was hurried, superficial, confused; which was confined to getting together a general list of the more serious sins, neglecting altogether a crowd of other sins which though less grave in appearance, are yet not less in reality. And how many there are who fail in this respect! That a person who confesses frequently and leads a regular life need not make a long examination of conscience is easily understood; but it is incomprehensible how men who remain for a long time away from confession and who lead a life of sin can venture to run over their examination as hurriedly as is often done.

(*b*) They can be bad in consequence of want of sincerity—a fault that is committed not only by wilfully concealing a sin through malice, but also in several other ways, such, for instance, as by neglecting certain doubts and feelings of remorse which are by no means negligible but which are never mentioned; by telling one's sins in an obscure or unintelligible fashion so that the priest does not see them in their true light; by using vague and general expressions conveying no definite information and suppressing the more important circumstances attending the sin. How many bad confessions may not be found in this class!

(*c*) Above all, they can be bad in consequence of defective contrition and purpose of amendment. Confession is not a mere matter of the lips and of words as those pretend who imagine they have made a good confession when they have declared all their sins. The accusation is indeed necessary, but it is the least essential part of the sacrament—the part most necessary to render the sacrament valid is contrition along with the firm purpose of sinning no more, and if this condition is wanting the confession will be null. There are many signs by which to distinguish defective contrition, all of which, as I explained on a former occasion, are incompatible with sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment.

You see, then, the various defects that may render your confessions null and void; and whoever is conscious of having fallen into one of these defects may be certain that he has not made a good confession, and consequently, if he wishes to save his soul, he is strictly bound to repair his past confessions by a good confession.

" Oh, I will do so later on, when I have time; meanwhile give me absolution for the present, I beg of you." Impossible—that would simply mean adding a new sacrilege to the others you have already committed. I can indeed allow you to defer a general confession as long as it is only a case of counsel and prudence; but when it is seen to be necessary, that is quite another matter—you must begin with the general confession itself, and while making it, act precisely as if you had never once confessed during all the period in question. There is only one difference, and it is that your confessions have only rendered your condition worse, because they were nothing more or less than a series of profanations and sacrileges which you must accuse yourself of along with your other sins.

Do not imagine it is enough to reply that you are in good faith concerning the sacraments already received, and that you do not wish to trouble or disturb your conscience. Good faith does not consist in closing one's eyes to the light and proceeding at haphazard without taking the least trouble to enquire into the validity of your confessions, even when there is a strong presumption to the contrary; but it does and must consist in a well-founded hope of having done all that could and ought to be done. To be troubled and anxious without reason or foundation is a sign of a scrupulous conscience; but to despise reasonable doubts and feelings of remorse as if they were vain and empty scruples is the sign of a loose and careless conscience.

Finally, general confession, though not precisely necessary, is often highly useful and not to be neglected.

1. First of all, it is advantageous to those who have never made one. Even supposing you are in good faith regarding the validity of your confessions and that you have no reasonable grounds for doubt on the point, it is nevertheless highly useful not to lose sight of the past, but occasionally to make a general review of your whole life. In ordinary commercial life prudence suggests a similar practice—notwithstanding the special individual accounts they make each day, business men are compelled occasionally to make a general inventory of their affairs in order to see how they stand. Now, should not this practice be much more carefully observed in the matter of our spiritual interests, and should we not pass in review the general state of our consciences in order to repair as far as possible the negligence and defects that may have crept into our ordinary confessions? If for no other reason, a general confession will be useful to repair the mistakes that may have been made during our tender years. We know that childhood often has enough malice to sin mortally without having enough good sense to repent and confess properly.

2. In the second place general confession is useful to those who are about to enter on a new state of life, such, for instance, as the state of matrimony or the ecclesiastical state, so as to remove all the obstacles that may stand in the way of the graces requisite for the proper discharge of the obligations they are about to contract. If this advice were only followed, there would not be so many scandals to deplore in the various walks of life.

3. General confession, finally, is useful in the case of those who have long led, if not a bad, at least a tepid, careless life, and who, consequently, have derived little or no fruit from the sacraments received during that period of languor and indifference. A general confession will serve to stir them up and renew them in Christian fervour.

How often does it not happen that penitents who commence a general confession, merely out of devotion or prudence, discover before it is finished that it was instead a matter of necessity for the unveiling of very substantial defects in their past confessions? Just as on visiting a building, it seems to us at first sight to be solid and secure, but on examining its various parts attentively we sometimes find it full of flaws, either in the foundation, or in the walls, or in the roof, if not altogether unsafe and threatening to fall to the ground. Penitents are sometimes too ready to reject general confession, on the excuse that they have no need of it; but let them only examine themselves carefully and they will find many things come to light which had hitherto lain hidden in darkness.

And now, which are the advantages of general confession? Masters of the spiritual life point out three :—

1. The first is that it inspires us with greater confusion on account of our past sins, and with a livelier and more intense sorrow for them. In our ordinary confessions we only consider the sins we have committed within a short space of time, and as a rule they do not strike us as very serious; but in a general confession we see all the sins we have ever committed, we see them such as they are in their united number, and we see how we have multiplied them with increase of years. At sight of this frightful multitude of sins, the heart becomes more easily moved and penetrated by repentance, as was the good and pious King Ezechias at the contemplation of his whole past life. *I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.*[1] How much more should not like sentiments fill the hearts of those who are far from having the piety of the good king! The dreadful forgetfulness of our last end, the enormous abuse of God's gifts and graces, the patience and long suffering He has manifested towards us—these and similar thoughts that arise on the occasion of a general confession cannot but make a deep impression, and cannot fail to move the heart of the penitent if he has not lost the faith completely.

2. The second effect of general confession is that it produces that peace, calm, and tranquillity which are unattainable as long as we are filled with noticeable feelings of remorse, uneasiness, and perplexity

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[1] Is. xxxviii. 15.

concerning the tepid, or, worse still, evil character of our previous lives. "I have confessed over and over again, but where is the result? Over and over again I have resolved to correct such and such a fault, and yet I did not amend. And my contrition, my purpose of amendmend—were they genuine? Who can tell me? If I came to die in such a condition, I hardly think my death could be calm and peaceful." Such are the thoughts, such the feelings of agitation and remorse that from time to time knock at the door of our hearts. Now a good general confession delivers us from all these fears and anxieties and along with the grace of God bestows peace and serenity of soul.

3. The third effect of general confession is that it strengthens us and gives us the helps necessary to persevere. We do not willingly lose the fruits of a work that has cost us no little trouble to accomplish; and having by means of a good general confession recovered peace of conscience, we consequently feel pledged to preserve it, while our very peace of conscience helps us to march steadily along the new route we have marked out for ourselves. Just like one who has put on a new dress takes every precaution to avoid staining it; so a soul clothed with sanctifying grace by means of a general confession stands on guard against every new stain that may be made by sin. It would be impossible to count the number of those who have succeeded by this means in perfectly reforming their lives, and in delivering themselves from the vices and bad habits which had hitherto seemed incurable and irresistible. And in practice it will be found that he who desires to abandon sin and pursue virtue hardly ever succeeds in doing so satisfactorily unless he commences with a general confession. This is why the masters of the spiritual life praise and recommend this practice so warmly. St. Vincent de Paul was its zealous propagator, while St. Francis de Sales lays it down as the foundation of a genuine conversion for all those who sincerely desire to dedicate themselves to God.

But in order to derive all those advantages from general confession it must be carefully made. Especially in the case of those to whom it is necessary if they do not wish to lose their time and trouble, weary their confessor, and succeed only in becoming worse off than before, that is to say, putting themselves in a condition of false and dangerous security, they should devote all the application they are capable of to their confession, and spare no pains to ensure the results they hope for.

Experience clearly proves that general confessions if made hurriedly and without due preparation are injurious rather than useful; and why? Because people often rely much on a general confession without having anything like sufficient grounds for their confidence.

On the pretext that they have made such a confession they bury the past in complete oblivion ; but what confidence can be placed in that confession if the manner in which it has been made affords good grounds for being in doubt about it just as much as about the previous ordinary confessions ? It is, then, of the utmost importance to make it carefully so that there may remain no room whatever for anxiety or reasonable doubt. Thus it is that you will derive the fruits already indicated.

I must not, however, allow you to be cast down and terrified by the difficulties and trouble attendant on a general confession. Many tremble at the very name, and imagine that it is so difficult as to be almost impossible, and hence, they are never able to bring themselves to attempt it. Such a notion is nothing else than a mere empty phantom.

In the first place the difficulties that are feared cannot concern contrition and purpose of amendment, since these are precisely the same in a general confession as in all other confessions—nay, they are much more easily excited in a general confession which, as already observed, directs your dismayed and sorrowing consideration to the whole sum total of the faults you have committed throughout the whole course of your life. The only difficulty, then, that can arise, concerns the examination and discovery of the sins that should be made known—the sins of many and various kinds, committed in different circumstances and at different periods of life. How, you may ask, how unravel this tangled mass ? how throw light on this infinite multitude of faults ?

You should, first of all, remember that you are not bound to do more than you are able to do ; and hence should you, through no fault of your own, forget some sin or sins, this fault will by no means hinder your reconciliation with God.

You should further remember that when you put yourself in the hands of a capable confessor he will render your task much easier by the questions he will put to you. Although you should not rely on this fact to neglect due self-examination, yet after you have done all you can the help given by the confessor to supply possible defects can be and is of great service in enabling penitents to discover any faults they may not have been able to call to mind of themselves.

Remember, finally, that if God does not demand absolute accuracy, not even in ordinary confessions, much less does He demand it in a general confession. Hence a capable confessor will not trouble you uselessly by attempting to obtain an absolute, exact, and minute exposition of your sins. His purpose is to obtain an outline, a picture of your life, and this he can accomplish sufficiently in few words

Many things you will make known of yourself, and many others which you do not directly refer to are easily understood by one who knows the nature of the human heart, and the consequences that are inseparable from certain habits, customs, and passions.

From these observations it should be clear that general confession is a task easily within the capacity of everyone, no matter how long the period over which it extends. Away, then, with all those difficulties which the demon rises up before your mind to prevent you from taking this step.

If general confession is necessary in your case the longer you defer it the more difficult it becomes. The traveller who in the course of his journey has to cross a torrent and finding the ford too difficult says to himself : " I will cross lower down," only discovers that the flood has increased to such an extent that it is hopeless to think of being able to cross. Thus will it be with you if you go on deferring the task from day to day—the confusion of your conscience will increase to such an extent that you will be at a loss to know where or how to begin.

If, however, it is not necessary, but only useful, you should not on that account omit it because of the difficulties you may experience; you should, on the contrary, reflect that these difficulties will be more than counterbalanced by the consolations you will derive during your whole future life, and especially at the hour of death. Oh ! how your heart will be soothed in that great moment by the reflection that you have settled in good time all that ever troubled your conscience ! What a consolation it will be to be able to say : *I have put all things in order*—it is not long since with the assistance of my confessor I repaired all that stood in need of repair ! Compare these sweet and consoling sentiments with the distracting thoughts that come to trouble one who, on the brink of eternity, sees his life stained by many and serious sins without finding a single source of comfort, not even in the remembrance of the confessions he has made—confessions which only form a new source of anguish and distress.

All who have a true sense of religion would desire to make a general confession in that great hour ; but is it always possible to do so then ? and even if it were, it is not more difficult and less meritorious ? If, then, from all that has been said you find that a general confession will be useful to you, and much more if you find that it is necessary, do not delay setting about it—make it now while you have leisure, while you can do it with care and attention, with less difficulty, with greater merit and with more abundant fruit.

CHAPTER XII

THE SACRAMENT OF EXTREME UNCTION

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—Extreme Unction to be frequently dwelt on.

In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin.[1] In these words of Holy Writ the pastor is tacitly recommended to neglect no opportunity that may present itself for exhorting his flock to meditate frequently on death. Now, the sacrament of Extreme Unction being, as it is, inseparably associated with the thought of the end of life, should, as is clear, be often spoken of—not only because it is right and proper to unfold and explain the mysteries of salvation; but also because by the frequent reflection that all men must one day die, the faithful will be led to control their depraved passions, with the result that they will be less troubled and afraid in the hour of death, and will even return thanks to God for having opened not only the way to true life in the sacrament of Baptism, but also for having instituted the sacrament of Extreme Unction and thus afforded us a readier path to heaven on our departure from this mortal life.

I.—NAME, NATURE AND INSTITUTION OF EXTREME UNCTION

2.—Is called Extreme Unction because the last to be administered.

To observe almost the same order as has been followed in the explanation of the other sacraments, it should be pointed out, first of all, that this sacrament is called *Extreme Unction*, because of all the sacred unctions prescribed to His Church by our Lord and Saviour this is the last administered. Hence our Fathers in the faith have called it the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and the sacrament of the Departing—expressions highly calculated to turn the minds of the faithful to the thought of their last moments.

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[1] Ecclus. vii. 40.

3.—Extreme Unction is a true sacrament.

It is of the first importance to show that Extreme Unction is a true sacrament; now this can be made very clear by weighing the words in which St. James the Apostle promulgated the law regarding this sacrament: *Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.*[1] In declaring that sins are remitted by this anointing, the Apostle thereby indicates the nature and efficacy of a sacrament.

And that this has been the unbroken teaching of the Catholic Church with regard to Extreme Unction is shown by the witness of many Councils; while the Council of Trent decreed this so formally as to pronounce anathema against those who should presume to teach or think otherwise. Innocent I. also earnestly recommends this sacrament to the faithful.

4.—Though there are several unctions they constitute but one sacrament.

The pastor, therefore, will unhesitatingly teach that Extreme Unction is a true sacrament; and that it is not several sacraments but one, even though administered with many unctions, each of which is accompanied by special prayers and a particular form of its own. It is one, however, not in this sense that the parts composing it cannot be divided, but because each of these parts contributes to its perfection, as is the case with every object composed of several parts. Just as a house is composed of many and various parts, yet derives its perfection from unity of plan; so in like manner the sacrament of Extreme Unction, although composed of several parts and words, yet is but one sign and effects only that one thing which it signifies.

5.—The matter of Extreme Unction.

The pastor will also explain the parts of this sacrament, that is to say, its matter and form, which, however, have not been neglected by St. James, and each of which is replete with its own peculiar mysteries.

Its element or matter, as the Councils, especially that of Trent, have declared, is oil consecrated by the bishop—not any kind of oil at all that is extracted from fatty or greasy substances, but olive oil and no other. Now this matter signifies perfectly the effect produced in the soul by virtue of Extreme Unction; for just as oil is highly efficacious in soothing bodily pain, so does the virtue of this sacrament lessen pain and anguish of soul.

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[1] James v. 14, 15.

Oil also restores health, gives gladness, and feeds light; while it is also very efficacious in renewing the powers of a body cast down by fatigue. Now all these signify the effect produced by the power of God in the invalid through the administration of Extreme Unction. Let this suffice as regards the matter of the sacrament.

6.—The form of Extreme Unction.

The form of Extreme Unction is the word and solemn prayer pronounced by the priest at each of the unctions: "Through this Holy Unction may God pardon thee all the evil thou hast done by the ill use of sight, smell, or touch."

And that this is the true and proper form of this sacrament is signified by the Apostle St. James when he says: *Let them pray over him, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man.*[1] Hence we see that the form is to be applied in the manner of a prayer. The Apostle did not determine the particular words in which that prayer was to be couched; but this has been handed down to us by the faithful and constant tradition of the Fathers, so that all the various Churches retain the same form as is used by the mother and mistress of them all—the Holy Roman Church. Some of them do indeed change certain words; for instance, instead of *May God pardon thee*, they say, *May He remit to thee*, or *May He spare thee*, and sometimes *May He remedy all the evil thou hast committed*; yet, as there is no alteration in the sense, the same form, it is clear, is religiously observed by all.

7.—Why the form of Extreme Unction is couched as a prayer.

No one should be surprised that while in the other sacraments the form either absolutely signifies what it effects, as when we say *I baptize thee*, and *I sign thee with the sign of the Cross*; or is pronounced by way of command, as is done in the administration of the sacrament of Orders, when the form is *Receive the power*; the form of Extreme Unction is the only one expressed after the manner of a prayer. Wisely and properly has it been so constituted. For, besides the spiritual grace which this sacrament bestows, it also aims at restoring health to the sick; yet as it does not always happen that the sick recover from their illness, the form is composed after the manner of a prayer, asking of the goodness of God an effect which the virtue of the sacrament does not always and at all times produce.

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[1] James v. 15.

Special ceremonies are used in the administration of this sacrament also; but they are, for the most part, prayers which the priest recites for the recovery of the sick. There is no other sacrament administered with more prayers; and rightly so, for it is in that moment above all that the faithful stand in greatest need of pious prayer. Hence it is that all who happen to be present, and especially the priest, should pour out their heartfelt prayers to God and earnestly commend to His mercy the life and salvation of the sufferer.

8.—Extreme Unction was instituted by Christ.

Since, as has been shown, Extreme Unction is truly and properly reckoned in the number of the sacraments, it follows, as a matter of course, that its institution is derived from Christ our Lord. It was afterwards proclaimed and promulgated to the faithful by St. James the Apostle, Our Saviour Himself, however, seems to have given some sort of example of this unction when He sent His disciples two and two, before His face. Of these the Evangelist thus wrote: *Going forth, they preached that men should do penance: and they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.*[1] Now we cannot suppose that this unction was invented by the Apostles; but it was prescribed by our Lord, and endowed by Him with a mystical rather than a natural power, to heal the soul rather than cure the body. This is taught by St. Denis, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory the Great, so that it is not possible to doubt that Extreme Unction is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, and that we must religiously accept it as such.

II.—THE ADMINISTRATION OF EXTREME UNCTION

9.—It is to be administered only to the sick in danger of death.

The faithful should be taught that, though this sacrament is destined for the use of all, there are certain classes of persons to whom it is not to be administered.

First of all it is not to be administered to those who are in good health. That Extreme Unction is not to be given to such, is the teaching of the Apostle when he says: *Is anyone sick among you?* and is proved from the fact that it was instituted to serve as the medicine, not only of the soul, but also of the body. Now only those who are sick require a remedy; and consequently Extreme Unction is to be administered to those only who are so dangerously ill as to afford ground for fear that the end of their life is drawing near.

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[1] Mark vi. 12, 13.

In this connexion they sin grievously who, before consenting to anoint the sick, are accustomed to wait till all hope of recovery is at an end and the dying have become unconscious. It is certain that to receive the grace of this sacrament more copiously it is of great importance that the sick should be anointed while reason and consciousness are still unimpaired and while they are still able, on their part, to contribute lively faith and sincere devotion. The pastor, then, should be very careful to apply this heavenly remedy, even though in itself it is always salutary, at a stage when he sees that it is likely to be rendered more profitable by the co-operation of the faith and piety of those who receive it.

To no one, therefore, who is not dangerously ill can the sacrament of Extreme Unction be administered—not even to those who stand in danger of death from some other cause, as, for instance, is the case with those about to undertake a dangerous voyage, or those about to take part in battle, with prospect of immediate death, or even those who have been condemned to capital punishment and are about to mount the scaffold. In addition to this, those who have not the use of reason are not fit subjects for the reception of this sacrament, as also children who have no sin and consequently have no need of this remedy to heal the ravages of sin. The same must be said of idiots and the insane, unless indeed they recover the use of reason at intervals, and especially if they show signs of pious disposition, and desire to be anointed. He who from his birth has never had the use of reason is not to be anointed; it is otherwise in the case of one who, while still in his right mind, desired to be made a partaker of this sacrament, and only afterwards became mad or delirious.

10.—How administered.

Not all the parts of the body are to be anointed, but those only which nature gives to man to serve as the organs of sense,—the eyes on account of sight; the ears, of hearing; the nostrils, of smell; the mouth, of taste and speech; the hand, of touch—a sense which, though diffused throughout the whole body, yet is more developed in the hands.

The universal Church observes this manner of anointing—a rite highly in keeping with the nature of this sacrament which is administered as a medicine. For just as in bodily diseases, even when the entire body is affected, the cure is applied to that part alone which is the seat and source of the malady; so also it is not the whole body that is anointed, but only those members which are the principal organs of the senses, as also the loins, which are, so to say, the seat of concupiscence, and the feet by which we move from place to place.

11.—Repetition of Extreme Unction.

It should be here observed that, during one and the same illness, as long as the sick person continues in the same danger of death, he is to be anointed only once. But if he recovers after the reception of Extreme Unction, he may receive the benefit of the sacrament as often as he falls back again into danger of death. Hence it is clear that Extreme Unction is to be regarded as one of the sacraments that may be repeated.

12.—Dispositions for the reception of Extreme Unction.

(*a*) But as every care should be taken that nothing be allowed to impede the grace of the sacrament, and as nothing is more opposed to it than the consciousness of mortal sin, the pastor will accurately follow the practice of the Catholic Church, and will administer the sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist before Extreme Unction.

(*b*) Let him, furthermore, strive to induce the sick to offer himself to the priest to be anointed in the same faith as those of old were accustomed to offer themselves to the Apostles to be healed. First, and before all else, the soul's health should be sought, and after that the health of the body, with the qualification: "If it is to the advantage of his eternal salvation." Nor should the faithful have any doubt that the holy and solemn prayers which are used by the priest—not in his own person, but in that of the Church and of our Lord Jesus Christ—will be heard.

And in this connexion they should be earnestly exhorted to be careful to demand that the sacrament of this saving oil be administered to them holily and religiously, as soon as the last great struggle becomes more keen, and the powers of mind and body begin to grow less.

13.—The minister of Extreme Unction.

Who is to be the minister of Extreme Unction we learn from the same Apostle, who promulgated our Lord's institution, when he says: *Let him bring in the priests*, by which words he does not, as the Council of Trent well explains, mean those who are advanced in years or who occupy the first place in the community, but priests duly ordained by bishops with the imposition of hands. It is consequently to priests that the administration of this sacrament has been committed,—not indeed to every priest, as the Church has decreed, but to the sick man's pastor, who possesses the proper jurisdiction, or to another priest authorized by him to act in his place. It should, however, be carefully remembered that in the administration of this, as of all the other sacraments, the priest acts in the name and person of Christ our Lord and the Holy Church, His spouse.

III.—EFFECTS OF EXTREME UNCTION

14.—The fruits of Extreme Unction.

The advantages we derive from this sacrament should also be diligently explained, so that if the faithful are led by no other motives, they may at least be attracted by considerations of their own advantage, especially as nature so ordains that we value almost all things in the light of our own interest:—

(*a*) The pastor, accordingly, will show that by this sacrament is conferred grace which remits sins and especially those lighter offences which are commonly called venial sins. As for mortal sins, they are effaced by the sacrament of Penance; the sacrament of Extreme Unction was not primarily instituted for the remission of grave sins—only Baptism and Penance accomplish this directly.

(*b*) The second advantage derived from Extreme Unction is that it frees the soul from the languor and infirmity produced by sin, and from all the other remains of sin. Now a most opportune time to effect this cure is that in which we are afflicted by some serious illness, and stand in danger of death. By his very nature, man dreads nothing in the world more than death—and this dread is intensified by the memory of past sins, especially when the voice of conscience utters its bitter reproaches. It is written: *They shall come with fear at the thought of their sins, and their iniquities shall stand against them* *to convict them.*[1] Along with this the anxious reflection grievously presses on us that ere long we must appear before the judgment seat of God, who will pronounce His all-just sentence according as each one has deserved. Frequently does it happen that inspired by this fear the faithful become deeply agitated and distressed; and nothing conduces so much to restore tranquillity to the soul at the hour of death as to cast aside sadness, await joyfully the coming of the Lord, and be ready and willing to restore the deposit entrusted to us as soon as He wills to demand it of us. An effect, then, of the sacrament of Extreme Unction is to free the minds of the faithful from this anxiety and fill the soul with pious and holy joy.

15.—Extreme Unction affords a shield against the assaults of the devil.

(*c*) We also derive from it another advantage which may justly be regarded as the greatest of all. As long as we live, the enemy of the human race never ceases for a single moment to plot and plan our downfall and ruin, and, if possible, he never strives so earnestly to rob us of our hope in the mercy of God as when he sees our last end draw nigh. Now in this sacrament the faithful are supplied with arms and strength to enable them to resist the adversary's force and violence, and victoriously to withstand him —the soul of the sick person is relieved and encouraged by hope in the goodness of God, strengthened by which, he bears all the burdens of his illness with greater ease and patience, and more readily eludes the wiles and artifices of the demon who lies in wait to destroy him.

16. — Bodily health is sometimes restored by Extreme Unction.

(*d*) Lastly follows bodily health, if this be for the good of the sick person. And if in our days the sick obtain this effect less frequently, this must be ascribed not to any defect in the sacrament, but to the fact that faith is weak in a great part either of those who receive or administer Extreme Unction. The Evangelist testifies that amongst His own our Lord *wrought not many miracles because of their unbelief.*[2] On the other hand it may be truly said that Christianity, now that it has taken deeper roots in the hearts of men, stands in less need of the support derived from miracles than it did formerly, in the infancy of the Church.

Nevertheless, faith should be earnestly stimulated in this regard; and no matter what, in the wisdom and designs of

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[1] Wis. iv. 20.

[2] Matt. xiii. 58.

God, may happen to the body, the faithful should rely on the assured hope of attaining health of soul by means of this holy oil, or, should they pass away, of experiencing the fruit of those glorious words: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*[1]

We have now set forth briefly all that regards the sacrament of Extreme Unction; and should these various points be expounded by the pastor at greater length, and with that due care which the subject demands, the faithful will be sure to derive considerable fruits of piety from his teaching.

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[1] Apoc. xiv. 13.

THE SACRAMENT OF EXTREME UNCTION

Q. What is Extreme Unction ?

A. Extreme Unction is a sacrament instituted for the spiritual as well as for the temporal comfort of the sick in danger of death.

Q. What are the effects of the sacrament of Extreme Unction ?

A. The sacrament of Extreme Unction produces the following effects : (1) It increases sanctifying grace ; (2) It remits venial sins, and also the mortal sins which the sick person, if contrite, is unable to confess ; (3) It takes away weakness and sloth which remain even after pardon has been obtained ; (4) It gives strength to bear illness patiently, to withstand temptation, and to die holily ; (5) It aids in restoring us to health of body if it is for the good of the soul.

Q. When should Extreme Unction be received ?

A. Extreme Unction should be received when the illness is dangerous, and after the sick person has received, if possible, the sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist ; it is even well to receive it while he has the use of his senses and has still some hope of recovery.

Q. Why is it well to receive Extreme Unction when the sick person has still the use of his senses, and has still some hope of recovery?

A. It is well to receive Extreme Unction while the sick person retains the use of his senses, and while there remains some hope of his recovery ; for he thus receives it with better dispositions, and is hence able to derive greater fruit from it ; and also because this sacrament restores health of body (should it be for the good of the soul) by assisting the powers of nature ; and hence it should not be deferred till recovery is despaired of.

Q. With what dispositions should the sacrament of Extreme Unction be received ?

A. The principal dispositions for receiving Extreme Unction are: To be in the state of grace ; to have confidence in the power of this sacrament and in the mercy of God ; and to be resigned to the will of the Lord.

Q. What should be the sick person's feelings on seeing the priest ?

A. On seeing the priest, the sick person should feel thankful to God for having sent him ; and should gladly receive the comforts of religion, which, if he is able, he should request himself.

Thirty-seventh Instruction on the Sacraments

EXTREME UNCTION: ITS INSTITUTION, NATURE, AND IMPORTANCE

OUR Divine Redeemer was not content with having furnished us throughout the whole course of our lives with several sacraments by which to acquire, recover, and more and more increase His grace in us; but He also willed, as the Council of Trent says, to prepare, in the sacrament of Extreme Unction, a powerful and efficacious remedy for the last moments of our life—for that all-important hour which decides nothing less than our eternal happiness or our eternal misery.

It is of this sacrament, which the Fathers call "the perfection of Penance, the crown and seal of the other sacraments," which perfects in us the image of the Christian, and completes the work of our eternal salvation, that I intend to speak to-day. It is very important that you should be well informed of it beforehand, because the time of its reception—the time of illness or of danger of death—is assuredly no time for long explanations. It is necessary, then, to anticipate that time, and thoroughly understand from to-day the worth and advantages of this sacrament, in order to value it as it deserves, to desire it when necessary, and to receive it with holy zeal; above all, it is necessary to cast aside certain common prejudices, which expose only too many Christians to the misfortune of not receiving it at all, or of receiving it badly, or at least of receiving it without deriving all the precious advantages which it should communicate to them.

Extreme Unction is a sacrament in which different parts of the sick person's body are anointed, accompanied by a certain form of prayer for his temporal and spiritual welfare.

This sacrament, like all the others, was instituted by Jesus Christ—it could only be by Him, because it pertains to God alone to give to external, corporeal and material things the power of producing interior, invisible and spiritual grace. We do not know precisely at what moment He instituted it; but it is certain that in the New Testament it is spoken of clearly as a sacrament already known and practised by the faithful. The words of the Apostle, St. James are decisive: *Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests* *of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord ; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.*[1]

Here we have all the essential parts of a sacrament—matter, form, minister, subject, and effects. The matter is seen to consist in olive oil, which, according to the practice of the Church, is consecrated by the bishop on Holy Thursday, and which is called oil of the sick, to distinguish it from the oil of catechumens used in Baptism, and from chrism used for Confirmation and for Ordination.

This oil is applied, by means of various anointings, to different parts of the body, and principally to the five senses, which are the five principal doors by which sin enters into the soul. The Lord willed that His grace should penetrate into the soul of man through the same channels by which sin has entered, and to sanctify him not only in his soul but also in his body, by restoring him to his first consecration. By Baptism our members become the members of Jesus Christ, and our body the living temple of the Holy Spirit ; but the sins committed during life have profaned these members and desecrated this temple. Now, Extreme Unction is the sacrament which purifies them and consecrates them anew to God by the application of the merits of Jesus Christ.

Multiplicity of anointings, however, is not necessary to the validity of the sacrament—a single one is sufficient when the sick person is on the point of expiring and there is no time to make them all.

The form of this sacrament consists of the prayers which accompany the anointings—*the prayer of faith.* The prayers used by the Church in the administration of this sacrament are very numerous—she recites the Penitential Psalms, the Litany of the Saints, and other prayers destined to excite in the sick person a spirit of penitence, and to draw down upon him the mercy of God ; but the one essential prayer is that which the priest repeats at each anointing, and which is worded thus : "By this Holy Unction and by His most gracious mercy, may God pardon thee whatever sins thou hast committed by sight (by hearing, by smell, by taste, by touch, by walking.")

The minister of the sacrament is the priest alone : *Let him bring in the priests.* The Church does not permit all priests to administer it—she reserves this right to the parish priest, or a priest delegated by him. We must except the case of necessity, when all priests can lawfully administer it. It is, however, fit and proper to convoke other priests when possible, in accordance with the words of St.

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[1] James v. 14, 15.

James: *Let him call in the priests,* to the end that they may pray together and assist in the administration of the sacrament. If this cannot be done, at least the family should assemble round the bed of death, and unite their prayers with those of the priest so as to add greater efficacy to a sacrament, which, to distinguish it from the others, is called the sacrament of prayer.

The subject of this sacrament is every one who is baptized, and who has at any time had the use of reason and consequently the capacity of sinning: *And if he be in sin.* It is, moreover, necessary that the person be sick and in probable danger of death: *Is any man sick among you?* For want of the first condition this sacrament cannot be administered to those who have not been baptized, nor to baptized children who have not attained the use of reason, nor to those who have been imbecile from their birth and who have never had a lucid interval—all these are incapable of sin. For want of the second condition it cannot be conferred on those who are condemned to death by law, nor to soldiers about to engage in battle, because, although these are in near danger of death, they are not so through illness.

It must not, however, be imagined that to confer and receive it, we should wait till the very last moment. This is a very widespread error, and is, perhaps, due to the very name which is given to this sacrament.

Now, why is this unction called "extreme"? Simply because it is the last of all the unctions prescribed by the Church—the first is given at Baptism, the second at Confirmation, the third at Ordination, and the last in illness. It is also called "extreme," because it is administered in probable danger of death; but this does not mean that we must wait until the moment when all hope of recovery is lost, and when the sick person is on the point of expiring. Such delay, as we shall shortly see, is directly opposed to one of the ends for which this sacrament has been instituted.

I wish here to remark that to this false notion are due the horror, the distaste, and the aversion that are displayed towards this sacrament, The love of life is so implanted in us that we are never willing to persuade ourselves that we have arrived at its close; and hence the very name of Extreme Unction troubles and terrifies us, as if it was an omen and a sign of approaching, imminent, inevitable death. This is why so many sick persons delay receiving it as long as they are able and even our very friends themselves, when they see us in grave danger, sometimes seek to retard the administration of this sacrament, as if the receiving of it were certain to hasten the end of life and imprint on the body the indelible stamp of death. Now this, I repeat, is a blind prejudice and a gross error. To be convinced of this, let us glance at the effects of this sacrament.

These effects are two: spiritual welfare and corporal welfare. Far from hastening death, Extreme Unction was instituted to restore the sick to health. And although this health may not be its ordinary, principal and essential effect, yet health does not fail sometimes to be produced by Extreme Unction, as happens when health can contribute to the salvation of the soul, or serve the designs of Providence. It is in this sense that we should understand the words of the Apostle St. James: *The prayer of faith shall save the sick man*, that is to say, will contribute to his recovery. With this precious remedy it was, adds the evangelist St. Mark, that the Apostles healed the sick. Hence it is that there are many pious souls who are so convinced of the efficacy of this sacrament that they prefer it to the most powerful remedies, and receive it with so much confidence that frequently they recover health.

Since, then, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this same sacrament as a corporal remedy, you at once see the great wrong done to themselves by sick persons who fear to receive it, just as if its reception meant signing their death-warrant. If they only had a little more faith in the virtue of the sacrament, they would eagerly ask for it when necessary, and hasten to receive it. The love of our own life and of the life of others, instead of hindering the reception of Extreme Unction, should rather contribute to its reception.

If we have so much confidence in medicines ought we not to have much more in God, who gives to these medicines all their efficacy? Is it not the same Creator and the same Supreme Master who has prepared for our health both medicines and sacraments? All our aversion to Extreme Unction comes, therefore, from our want of instruction and faith.

But you may say: "What troubles me is that nearly all die after having received Extreme Unction, while very few recover their health."

To this I reply: Do those who die, die because they have received it? Certainly not; if this sacrament does not give back health, no one can prove that it leads to death. Moreover, cases are far from rare in which people recover after having received this sacrament. For my part, I know several people who are in perfect health, even though they received Extreme Unction more than once.

It comes to this; if many die, it is due to the fact that they put obstacles in the way of the sacrament by their lack of faith and confidence, or by their positive unworthiness; or because they defer its reception until they are actually expiring, and would need a miracle to recover; whereas Extreme Unction has not been instituted to work miracles. If this sacrament does restore health it is in the course of God's ordinary Providence—recovery is indeed a special grace, but not a real miracle. God enlightens the physician, blesses the remedies, and imperceptibly cures the sick person.

You ought not, then, to wait to receive it, until all hope of recovery is at an end,—to do so would be to tempt God by asking a miracle of Him. To receive it you need not be in imminent danger of death—it is by no means necessary that death should be close at hand and inevitable. So true is this, that for many centuries this sacrament was administered before the holy Viaticum; and hence they did not then wait until the sick person was in extremity, but it was enough that his condition was serious. This ought to be enough for us, without relying too much on doctors who, very often, in order not to alarm the sick, hardly speak of the holy Viaticum, and seldom of Extreme Unction.

But what should inspire us with greater zeal in the matter is the spiritual effects that this sacrament produces in the soul—effects which the greater number of Christians deprive themselves of, either totally or in part, as a result of receiving it only when they are already in agony, senseless and unconscious, and consequently are incapable of affording any co-operation of their own. Corporal welfare is only a secondary and conditional effect; the first and principal effect, an effect that is infallible as long as no obstacle is put in this way, is the salvation of the soul—which effect is produced by various special graces designed to strengthen us to face the dangers of this great journey, and to obtain for us a death holy and precious in the sight of the Lord. In our next instruction I shall speak of the special graces which are received in this sacrament.

I close to-day's instruction just as I opened it—by drawing attention to the great kindness and the infinite mercy of the Lord, who has deigned to prepare salutary remedies for all the days and all the needs of our life.

Hardly are we born to temporal life—the life of the unfortunate children of Adam, the life of sinners and slaves of the devil—when God prepares us a salutary bath in the waters of Baptism, to regenerate us to a new, spiritual, supernatural, and divine life. As soon as we have reached the age of reason, and are consequently exposed to the danger of losing the grace of holy Baptism, the Lord fortifies our soul by Confirmation, and gives us, in this second sacrament, an abundance of grace which he had not conferred on us in the first. Then, as our miserable nature inclines us to evil, we have, in the sacrament of Penance, another heavenly bath, destined to heal the wounds of our soul, and this sacrament is at our disposal at all hours and at all times. To grow and increase in spiritual life, our soul has constant need of nourishment, and Jesus Christ has prepared such nourishment for us in the Blessed Eucharist with His flesh and His blood. Finally, as it is of the greatest importance to finish our life well and as at the supreme moment of death we are exposed to a multitude of dangers, we have Extreme Unction to help us make our last great journey. All that is in us has need of remedy and support in that great moment—the body as well as the soul. The body is completely prostrated by the ravages of illness; the soul utterly weakened by the feebleness of the body; pain, anguish, remorse overwhelms us, and the devil is on the watch to use all for our ruin. So sad and so dangerous a state demands prompt and powerful help, and, thanks to God, this help we have in Extreme Unction.

What more could the Lord do for us, both during life and in death, to show that he is a Father of infinite kindness and love? Let us thank Him with all our heart for His great mercy, and let us thank him particularly to-day for the assistance which He has prepared for us in that supreme moment when the whole world will abandon us and cannot be of the slightest use to us. Let us pray, then, that we may be worthy of this sacrament, and let us strive to live from henceforth in such a way as not to deserve to be deprived of this great grace.

This should not be difficult for us if we had death always present in our thoughts; but such a thought is only too often rejected and held in abhorrence. We think of ourselves as being here below for ever; scarcely do we deign to cast a thought upon death which must come one day, and which may surprise us at any instant. And hence it is, that so many live a bad life and persevere in sin, with heads full of vanity, and hearts replete with passion, sin and vice.

To such as these, death comes unexpectedly, and the mournful warning to prepare themselves for the other life falls on their ear: *Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die.* And then, instead of the help and consolation that pious and vigilant souls find in the sacraments of the Church, the invitation to receive them inspires only trouble and confusion. It is necessary, however, for them to receive them, and they do receive them; but what can be the result, if the heart is not there, if all that they do has no other motive than fear, dread, and necessity?

This is what happens daily to many. God grant that this misfortune may not happen to us. To prevent it, I exhort you not to forget your last hour, and sometimes at night, when stretched on your bed, to think that you see the priest at your side, imparting the holy unction to your senses to atone for the ill-use you have made of them by offending the Lord in the days that were devoted to dissipation, to sin, and to forgetfulness of your soul and of God. This thought will enable you to keep your body pure and holy ; to live as you would then wish to have lived ; and thus you will render Extreme Unction fruitful and consoling, and it will truly become the token either of your bodily recovery or of your eternal felicity.

Thirty-eighth Instruction on the Sacraments

SPECIAL EFFECTS OF EXTREME UNCTION

ONE of the effects of Extreme Unction is, as we saw in our last instruction, the recovery of bodily health, provided this conduces to the health of the soul ; and hence the sentiments of fear with which this sacrament is so often viewed are vain, unreasonable, and exceedingly injurious.

Recovery, however, is only a secondary and conditional effect of Extreme Unction. For recovery is not always a real benefit to the sick person, nor is it always in conformity with the designs of the Lord. But besides bodily recovery this sacrament produces other effects in the soul—effects that are infallible if we put no obstacle in the way, and are of such importance that they should be a still stronger motive not to delay receiving it in case of grave illness. It is of these effects that I have now to speak. What, then, are they ?

I shall not speak here of the general effect common to all the sacraments of the living, that is to say, the increase of sanctifying grace ; but only of the special effects of this sacrament—effects bearing on the needs of the invalid in his state of infirmity. Now, these effects can be reduced to two : it effaces sin and the remains of sin, and it gives strength against the dangers that attend the hour of death.

It has, then, in the first place, the power of effacing sin. And what sin ? Mortal or venial ? Regarding venial sins there is no doubt, provided the sick person does not retain any affection for them and puts no obstacle in the way of this grace. But the virtue of this sacrament extends also to mortal sin. It is not that Extreme Unction is the ordinary remedy instituted by Jesus Christ to efface mortal sin —we know that this remedy is Penance—but it can, however, supply, and does, in fact, supply the place of Penance in many cases. And such cases are very frequent. For instance, a person is suddenly seized with a severe illness which deprives him of the use of his senses —sight, speech, hearing—but which, however, leaves him perfectly conscious and capable of making acts of interior contrition, yet without being able to manifest it outwardly by signs or words. The chief help the Church is able to offer him, in this state, is Extreme Unction, which enhances the value of his interior acts and procures him the remission of his sins. The same may be said of those who having suddenly lost the use of their senses and reason, but who, at the moment when the illness surprised them have had a sufficient sorrow for their faults. It can also happen in the case of one who has been to confession, but who had certain grave sins that he did not remember; now, these sins are also remitted by the virtue of Extreme Unction, provided he has had implicit contrition for them.

Thus, although this sacrament is really a sacrament of the living, intended to increase sanctifying grace, it may, nevertheless, become a sacrament of the dead, effacing sins and restoring lost grace. If you are able to confess, you ought to do so—you cannot dispense with it; but as long as confession is impossible or involuntarily incomplete, Extreme Unction supplies the absence or defect.

Such is the Catholic doctrine, founded on the words of St. James, who attributes to this sacrament the remission of sins without any distinction between mortal and venial: *And if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him*; on the form of the sacrament which extends to all sins, without exception, both mortal and venial: "May the Lord pardon thee all thou hast done wrong;" and on the language of the Church and of the Fathers, who call Extreme Unction the supplement, the perfection and the consummation of Penance. We should hence conclude that people can be and actually are saved by means of this sacrament and that without it they would be damned.

In addition to sin, I have added that it also destroys the remains of sin. Now what do we mean by the remains of sin? Two things: First, the bad dispositions that sins, even though pardoned, leave in the soul; such, for instance, as feebleness, languor, and a certain propensity to evil, which renders the soul little disposed for well-doing, and much inclined to fall again. Now, though this sacrament does not entirely destroy bad habits already contracted, it gives energy and strength to the soul of the sick person to enable him to persevere in the grace he has received.

By the remains of sin, we understand, in the second place, the temporal punishments we owe to God for the sins that have been pardoned as to their guilt. These punishments are remitted by this sacrament, either totally or in part, according to the greater or less degree of fervour with which it has been received. But I have said enough of the first effect; let us pass on to the second.

The second spiritual effect of Extreme Unction, is to arm the sick persons against the dangers of the last journey. Now there are three principal dangers attendant on that hour.

The first arises from the sufferings we have then to bear. The violent sufferings of a mortal malady put the invalid's patience to such a terrible test, that more than ordinary strength is necessary to support them in a Christian manner. From this species of martyrdom comes the inability to perform, or at least great difficulty in performing, acts of piety, and what is worse, the temptation to new sins, such, for instance, as passion, anger, and fury against the illness, and against the persons of the house—all of which involve an open revolt against the supreme and ever adorable will of God, to the great scandal of those who are present.

But this sacrament comes to help our frailty with a special strengthening grace—*And the Lord shall raise him up*—a grace destined to smooth our sufferings, and render them more acceptable, or at least to give us the strength and courage to support them patiently, and not to let us be conquered and driven into sin. Hence the Lord has chosen oil to be the matter of this sacrament, because oil produces the double effect of strengthening the members, and of soothing and calming pain. The athletes of old used if for the first object, and we see it still used to-day for the second, in different ways. This it is the Church asks of God in the blessing of this holy oil: "To banish pain and all infirmity."

The second danger—a danger much more formidable to the sick —is a certain sadness produced by the sight of death and as a consequence of the inevitable separation from all that is dear. Nothing can affright the soul so much as the approach of death. If many tremble at the bare thought of it, what must be the terror and fear of those who behold it at hand! What will not be the terror and consternation of those especially who have led a life of sin! What increase of terror will not be produced in them by remorse of conscience, the knowledge of their faults and of the judgment of God which awaits them, and which by its irrevocable sentence will decide in one moment their lot for all eternity! In a word, both the life they leave and the life they begin combine to overshadow the spirit with fear and terror.

But here again we find great strength and powerful help in Extreme Unction, which possesses the virtue of calming terror and consternation, by communicating to the soul of the sick person a holy courage; by exciting in him a great confidence in divine goodness; and by filling his heart and soul with peace and calm. For this we have the words of the Council of Trent: "It raises up the spirit of the sufferer by exciting in him a great confidence in divine mercy."

The third danger arises from the devil and his terrible temptations. That the devil, in this extreme moment, attacks us with more violence than ever cannot be doubted, since the Holy Scripture tells us expressly: *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.*[1] Knowing that he has but little time, that the soul is either about to become his prey or escape him for ever, he redoubles his efforts and uses all his wiles and snares to draw it into his net. In the absence of other means he attacks the invalid in his imagination, in his mind, in his heart, bringing back to him the dangerous memories of the past, and exciting in him impure affections and doubts regarding faith; and he succeeds all the more easily when the approach of eternity troubles and frightens in a terrible manner. "Who knows," he suggests, "if all that is said and preached about the future life is true?" He neglects nothing to secure a sinful consent and accomplish the invalid's damnation.

But the means that he uses above all others to destroy the dying is one of two excesses—despair or presumption.

He fills the heart of one with loss of confidence, puts before his eyes horrible pictures of his life, of divine justice outraged, menacing, and ready to strike him, and at the same time carefully drives out all thoughts of the divine mercy and thus leads him to die hopeless and despairing like Judas.

Now the persons most exposed to this temptation are precisely those who, during their life, presume much on the divine goodness when they set about committing sin. But the scenes change, and their foolhardy confidence is now succeeded by fear and overwhelming despair. How difficult it is for the priest to calm their agitation, and try to make a ray of confidence in God penetrate into their hearts! "But can I hope," they say, "that God will take pity on me, and will pardon my sins? Am I truly contrite and really penitent? Ah! how everything frightens and overwhelms me, and makes me believe that I am lost!" Such is the language of those who hitherto had posed as strong-willed and independent, who had ridiculed everything, and had treated the terrors of death as scruples and prejudices. Oh! were this spectacle which the priest is so often a witness to only given to men who act similarly, it would assuredly be much more efficacious than all our preaching. In that supreme moment our way of looking at things changes, and everything appears in a different light. Life is a time of obscurity and darkness in all that concerns faith and the great truths of the life to come. Creatures, passions, amusements business interests, occupy our minds and so distract us that we catch but fleeting glimpses and are but vaguely conscious of those truths. But in the hour of death they stand forth in all their naked truth, and in all their deadly reality; and the demon fails not to turn them to account so as to banish confidence and persuade us that we are utterly and hopelessly lost.

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[1] Apoc. xii. 12

Towards others, the demon pursues quite a different course, and in place of tempting them to despair he inspires them with a false and presumptuous confidence in the goodness and mercy of God—a surprising though extremely common fact. We meet Christians who live in continual forgetfulness of God and abandon themselves to vices and disorders of all sorts; and yet, relying on the sacraments of Penance and the Viaticum, they present an air of tranquillity and assurance such as not even the solitaries of Egypt and the Thebaid after thirty or forty years' penance in the desert ever dreamt of exhibiting at the hour of death. Whence this attitude? God, they claim, is good and merciful and will have pity on us. Very true—we can never have too much confidence in the goodness and mercy of God, which is infinitely superior to all our malice; but it should be borne well in mind that this confidence must be united to a sincere and supernatural sorrow for the offences offered Him. Now, as this sorrow is clearly wanting in those who comprehend but little, if at all, the gravity and enormity of their sins, so their confidence is groundless and is nothing more than a deceitful delusion inspired by the devil. This false and monstrous idea of the goodness of God, which the devil suggests to them during life to induce them to commit and endlessly multiply sins, accompanies them even in the hour of death and prevents them from recognizing and sincerely detesting their sins; and unfortunate that they are, they have not long to wait to be undeceived—hardly have they rendered their last sigh when instead of the expected mercy of God, they find themselves in the hands of His inexorable justice.

Now, how are we to strengthen and defend ourselves against the assaults and temptations to which we shall be exposed by the demon in that hour? I know well that in this, as in all other cases, great help may be derived from the presence of a good priest to whom you can open your heart, hiding nothing of all that troubles you; but the most powerful help of all must be looked for in Extreme Unction which, as the Council of Trent says, has been instituted to enable the dying person to resist the efforts and artifices of the evil spirit with greater ease and facility. And this is effected by means of certain special helps adapted to this end—lights for the soul, pious impulses for the heart, and especially the grace to avoid the extremes of despair on the one hand, and of presumption on the other hand—between fear and hope, between sorrow for sin and confidence in God—so that your sorrow for your sins, be it ever so keen and intense, will not lessen the confidence you should place in God, nor your confidence in God diminish the sorrow and fear that the sight of your sins should produce —a grace symbolized by the oil which of its nature is strengthening and soothing, and which thus signifies that the interior unction of grace conferred in this sacrament strengthens the fearful and diffident sinner and softens the hardness and insensibility of his heart by penetrating him with salutary compunction.

Without wasting more words, you will at once see how precious are the fruits and the advantages of this sacrament ; and since this is truly the case, it is consequently of the utmost importance to fortify ourselves in our need so as to acquire strength to bear our sufferings, gladden the soul midst the terrors of death, and place ourselves above all the assaults of the tempter.

And not alone should we be fully convinced of the importance of this sacrament, but also of its necessity. Not indeed that it is absolutely necessary and indispensable, since a sick person who dies without having been able to receive it is not culpable, and is not excluded thereby from the kingdom of heaven. But those who, being able to receive it, refuse or wilfully neglect to do so are culpable (1) because they disobey our Lord's precept, formally expressed in the words of St. James: *Is any sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church*, etc. ; (2) because they voluntarily deprive themselves of the graces attached to this sacrament, and show that they value them little ; and (3) because they voluntarily expose themselves to the greatest of all misfortunes—the danger of dying a bad death.

It now remains for us to dwell on the dispositions requisite for the reception of Extreme Unction, which are two—one of which is rigorously necessary for the validity of the sacrament, the other being simply fitting and proper, and even necessary for the sacrament to produce all its fruits.

The disposition that is rigorously necessary is the state of grace acquired by a good Confession, which delivers us from mortal sin ; or at least, if we are unable to make a Confession, a sincere sorrow for our sins. If you are in a state of grace, Extreme Unction will, as I have said, give you an increase of grace ; but if you are in a state of sin and unable to make a Confession, this sacrament will remit your sins, provided always that you have contrition. It is the practice of the Church to administer Extreme Unction to those even who are perfectly unconscious—a practice that would not exist were no fruit derived therefrom ; at the same time it should be borne in mind that to participate in the graces of the sacrament it is necessary that, before losing consciousness, there should exist sufficient sorrow for all sins committed, since in the sight of God no sin is pardoned without genuine contrition or attrition.

But for Extreme Unction to produce all its fruits, in addition to sanctifying grace, or at least contrition for sin, it is also required that the sick person should accompany the action of the priest with sentiments of piety and devotion, that is to say he should have (1) a great desire of receiving the sacrament; (2) a lively confidence in the effects it is capable of producing in us; (3) should as far as possible unite his intentions and prayers to those of the priest and of the Church, and especially to sincere sentiments of sorrow—at each unction demanding pardon of God for the sins he may have committed by each one of his senses in particular; and (4) should make frequent acts of faith, hope, and charity; of detachment from the world; of voluntary sacrifice of life; of a free and generous acceptance of death in union with that much more bitter and painful death undergone by Jesus Christ for love of us. The more intense and perfect these sentiments the more copious and abundant will be the grace conferred by Extreme Unction.

Now it is easy to see that all this is impossible for those who are not perfectly aware of what is being done, or who are not sufficiently conscious of their state and of that of their soul; and hence becomes still more evident the necessity referred to of not deferring its reception till the very last moment of life. Besides running the risk of being deprived of the sacrament altogether as happens only too often in the case of those who put it off from day to day, you would certainly deprive yourself of the copious fruits that are produced by Extreme Unction when received consciously, and with proper preparation.

I will conclude by asking a question: What can a person dangerously ill and on the point of death desire if not one of two things—to be restored to health, or to die a holy death? Now, either one or other of these is infallibly obtained by those who receive Extreme Unction with the requisite dispositions. It will either drive away the danger of death, and restore you to bodily health; or it will place your soul in an excellent condition to appear before the tribunal of God.

Why, then, hesitate to receive it? why defer it? Nay, what, on the contrary, should not be your eagerness and anxiety to receive it? Let us, then, show that we have not lost reason, prudence, and faith; and while we are in health let us pray God to make us worthy in His own good time of that precious sacramental balsam which is to be the seal of a Christian life and our safeguard in that dreadful and inevitable moment on which eternity depends. This moment must come sooner or later; and happy they who will be found fully prepared.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—Importance of this sacrament.

IF we attentively consider the nature and essence of the other sacraments, it will readily be seen that they depend on the sacrament of Holy Orders to such an extent that without it some of them could not be constituted or administered at all, while others would be deprived of all their solemn ceremonies as well as of a certain part of the religious respect and exterior honour accorded to them. In his exposition of the doctrine of the sacraments, it will accordingly be necessary for the pastor to bear in mind that it is his duty to explain with even special care all that concerns the sacrament of Orders.

This explanation will be highly advantageous. First of all to the pastor himself, then to all those who have entered on the ecclesiastical state, and finally to the people in general. To the pastor himself, because by treating of this subject he himself will be more deeply moved to stir up within himself the grace he has received in this sacrament; to those who have been called to the Lord's sanctuary, partly by animating them with a like spirit of piety, and partly by affording them an opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of such things as will enable them all the more easily to advance to higher orders; to the rest of the faithful, first by enabling them to understand the respect due to the Church's ministers, and secondly, as it often happens that many may be present who have destined their children for the Church's service, or who desire to embrace that life themselves, it is far from right that such persons should be unacquainted with the principal truths regarding this particular state.

I.—DIGNITY AND EXCELLENCE OF HOLY ORDERS

2.—Dignity of this sacrament.

In the first place, then, the faithful should be shown how great is the dignity and excellence of this sacrament considered in its highest degree—the Priesthood.

Bishops and priests being, as they are, God's interpreters and ambassadors, empowered in His name to teach mankind the divine law and the rules of conduct, and holding, as they do, His place on earth, it is evident that no nobler function can be imagined than that of theirs. Justly, therefore, are they called not only Angels, but even Gods, because of the fact that they exercise in our midst the power and prerogatives of the Immortal God.

In all ages, priests have been held in the highest honour; yet the priests of the New Testament far exceed all others who have preceded them. For the power of consecrating and offering the body and blood of our Lord, and of forgiving sins, which has been conferred on them, surpasses human reason and intelligence—there is simply nothing like it in the world.

3.—Not everyone is called to this state.

And as our Saviour was sent by His Father, and as the Apostles and disciples were sent into the world by Christ our Lord, so priests are daily sent with the same powers, *for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ.*[1]

The burthen of this great office, therefore, should not be rashly or lightly imposed on anyone, but is to be conferred on those only who by their holiness of life, their knowledge, faith and prudence, are able to bear its weight. Let no one *take the honour to himself but he that is called by God as Aaron was*;[2] and they are called by God who are called by the lawful ministers of His Church. It is to those who arrogantly intrude themselves into this ministry that the Lord must be understood to refer when He says: *I did not send prophets, yet they ran.*[3] Nothing can be more unhappy and wretched than such a class of men as this, and nothing more calamitous to the Church of God.

4.—The dispositions demanded in candidates for Holy Orders.

But as in every action we undertake it is of the highest importance to have a good motive in view—if the motive is good, the rest proceeds harmoniously—the candidate for Holy Orders should first of all be admonished to entertain no purpose unworthy of so exalted an office.

This subject demands very careful attention in view of the fact that in these days the faithful often sin gravely in this respect. Some there are who embrace this state to secure the necessaries of life, and who, consequently, seek in the Priesthood, just as other men do in the lowest walks of life, nothing more or less than gain. Though both the natural and divine law lay down, as the Apostle remarks, that he who serves the altar should live by the altar; yet to approach the altar for the sake of gain and money is one of the very gravest of sacrileges.

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[1] Eph. iv. 12. [2] Heb. v. 4. [3] Jer. xxiii. 21.

Some are attracted to the Priesthood by ambition and love of honours; while there are others who desire to be ordained simply in order that they may abound in riches, as is proved by the fact that unless some wealthy benefice were conferred on them, they would not dream of receiving Holy Orders. It is such as these that our Saviour describes as hirelings, who, in the words of Ezechiel, *feed themselves and not the sheep*,[1] and whose baseness and dishonesty have not only brought shame and reproach on the ecclesiastical state, so much so that hardly anything is now more vile and contemptible in the eyes of the faithful, but also end in this that they derive no other fruit from their Priesthood than was derived by Judas from the Apostleship which only brought him everlasting destruction.

But they, on the other hand, who are lawfully called by God, and who undertake the ecclesiastical state with the single motive of promoting the honour of God, are truly said to enter the Church by the door.

5.—Special obligations of the Priesthood to serve God in holiness and justice.

This, however, must not be taken as if the same law did not bind all men equally. All have been created to honour God, and this the faithful in particular, who have obtained the grace of Baptism, should do *with their whole heart, their whole soul, and with all their strength.*

But those who desire to receive the sacrament of Orders, should aim not only at seeking the glory of God in all things—an obligation admittedly common to all men, and particularly to the faithful—but also to serve Him *in holiness and justice*,[2] in whatever branch of His ministry they may be placed. Just as in the army all the soldiers obey the general's orders though they all have not the same functions to discharge—one being a colonel, another a captain, and so on; in like manner, though all the faithful should diligently practise piety and innocence—which are the chief means of honouring God—yet they who are in Holy Orders have certain special duties and functions to discharge in the Church. Thus they offer sacrifice for themselves and for all the people ; they explain God's law and exhort and form the faithful to observe it promptly and cheerfully ; they administer the sacraments of our Lord Jesus Christ by means of which all grace is conferred and increased ; and, in a word, they are separated from the rest of the people to fill by far the greatest and noblest of all ministries.

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[1] Ezech. xxxiv. 8.

[2] Luke i, 75.

Having expalined all this, the pastor will now turn his attention to the special properties of this sacrament, so that the faithful who desire to enter into the ecclesiastical state may understand the nature of the office to which they are called and the extent of the power bestowed by God on the Church and her ministers.

II.—THE POWER CONFERRED BY HOLY ORDERS

6.—The power conferred by Orders is twofold.

This power is twofold—the power of Orders and the power of Jurisdiction.

The power of Orders has for its object the real body of Christ our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist.

The power of Jurisdiction refers altogether to the mystical body of Christ. The scope of this power is to govern and rule the Christian people, and lead them on the way to the unending bliss of heaven.

7.—The power of Orders.

The power of Orders not only embraces the power of consecrating the Eucharist, but also fits and prepares the soul for its reception ; it also embraces all else that can have any reference to the Eucharist. Regarding this power numerous passages of Sacred Scripture may be adduced ; but the weightiest and most striking are those which are read in St. John and St. Matthew : *As the Father,* says our Lord, *hath sent Me I also send you. . . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained ;*[1] and : *Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven* [2]—texts which, when expounded by the pastor in accordance with the teaching and authority of the Fathers, will throw great light on this truth.

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[1] John xx. 21, 23.

[2] Matt. xviii. 18.

8.—The sublimity of this power.

This power far excels that given under the law of nature to those who were charged with the care of sacred things. The period previous to the written law must have had its priesthood and its spiritual power, since it certainly had its law; for law and priesthood are, as the Apostle testifies, so closely connected that if the priesthood is transferred, the law must necessarily be transferred also.[1] Guided, therefore, by a natural instinct, men recognized that God is to be worshipped; and hence it followed that in every nation some, whose power might in a certain sense be called spiritual, were given the care of sacred things and of divine worship.

This power was also possessed by the Jews; but though it was superior in dignity to that with which priests were invested under the law of nature, yet it must be regarded as far inferior to the spiritual power that is found in the New Law—a power all heavenly, and surpassing even that of angels—a power which is derived not from the Mosaic Priesthood, but from Christ our Lord who was a Priest, not according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchisedech. Yes, He it is who, Himself endowed with the supreme power of granting grace and remitting sins, left that power—limited indeed in extent and attached to the sacraments—to His Church. To exercise this power certain ministers are appointed and solemnly consecrated, which consecration is called the sacrament of Orders, or Ordination.

9.—Why called Order.

The Fathers used this word, which in itself has a most extensive signification, to show their appreciation of the dignity and excellence of God's ministers.

And in fact, order, when understood in its strict meaning and acceptation, is the arrangement of superior and inferior things so disposed as to stand in mutual relation towards each other. Now as in this ministry there are many grades and various functions, and as all these are disposed and arranged according to a definite plan, the name of Order has been well and properly applied to it.

III.—IT IS A TRUE SACRAMENT

10.—Order, a true sacrament.

That sacred Ordination is to be numbered amongst the sacraments of the Church, the Council of Trent has established by the same train of reasoning as we have already used several times. Since a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing, and since the outward action in this consecration denotes the grace and power bestowed on him who is consecrated, it becomes clearly evident that Order must be truly and properly regarded as a sacrament. Thus the bishop, handing to him who is being ordained, a chalice with wine and water, and a paten with bread, says : " Receive the power of offering sacrifice," etc., in which words, pronounced along with the application of the matter, the Church has always taught that the power of consecrating the Eucharist is conferred, and that on the soul becomes impressed a character bringing with it grace necessary for the due and proper discharge of the duties of that office, as the Apostle declares thus : *I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee, by the imposition of my hands ; for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of sobriety.*[1]

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[1] Heb. vii. 12.

11.—There are several Orders in the Church.

Now, to use the words of the Council of Trent, " The ministry of so sublime a Priesthood being a thing all divine, it is but befitting its worthier and more reverent exercise that in the Church's well-ordered disposition there should be several different orders of ministers destined to assist the Priesthood by virtue of their office—orders arranged in such a way that those who have already received clerical Tonsure should be raised, step by step, from the lower to the higher orders."

12.—These are seven in number.

The pastor will, therefore, show that these Orders are seven in number, and that this is the constant teaching of the Catholic Church. These orders are that of Porter, Lector, Exorcist, Acolyte, Sub-deacon, Deacon, and Priest.

That the number of ministers was wisely established thus, may be proved by considering the various offices that are necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the consecration and administration of the Blessed Eucharist, this being the principal scope of their institution.

They are divided into Major (also called Sacred) and Minor Orders. The Major or Holy Orders are Priesthood, Deaconship and Sub-deaconship ; while the Minor Orders are those of Acolyte, Exorcist, Lector and Porter, concerning each of which we shall now say a few words so that the pastor may be able to explain them to those especially who, he knows, are about to receive any of the Orders in question.

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[1] 2 Tim. i. 6, 7.

IV.—TONSURE

13.—Signification of the words tonsure and cleric.

Beginning with the first, Tonsure, the pastor will show that it is a sort of preparation for the reception of Orders. As men are prepared for Baptism by exorcisms and for Matrimony by promise of marriage, so to those who dedicate themselves to God—by Tonsure the way is opened that leads to the sacrament of Orders—by Tonsure is signified the character and disposition of him who desires to devote himself to the sacred ministry.

Regarding the name of cleric, which is then given him for the first time, it is derived from the fact that he thereby begins to take the Lord for his lot and inheritance, just as those who amongst the Jews were attached to the service of God were forbidden by the Lord to have any part of the ground that would be distributed in the Land of Promise : *I,* He said, *am thy portion and inheritance.*[1] And although these words are true of all the faithful, yet it is certain that they apply in a special way to those who consecrate themselves to the service of God.

14.—The custom of shaving the crown of the head.

The hair of the head is cut off in the form of a crown. It should be always worn thus, and should be enlarged according as one is advanced to higher Orders. The Church teaches that this usage is derived from Apostolic origin, as mention is made of it by the most ancient and authoritative Fathers, such as St. Denis the Areopagite, St. Augustine and St. Jerome.

It is said that the Prince of the Apostles first introduced this usage, in memory of the crown of thorns which was put upon our Saviour's head, so that the devices resorted to by the impious for the ignominy and torture of Christ might be used by His apostles as a sign of honour and glory, as well as to signify that the ministers of the Church should strive to imitate our Lord and represent Him in all things.

Some, however, assert that by tonsure is denoted the royal dignity, that is, the portion reserved for those who are called to the inheritance of the Lord. It will readily be seen that what the Apostle Peter says of all the faithful: *You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation,*[1] applies especially and with much greater reason to the ministers of the Church.

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[1] Num. xviii. 20.

Still there are some who consider that by the circle, which is the most perfect of all figures, is signified the profession of a more perfect life undertaken by ecclesiastics; while in view of the fact that the hair of their heads, which is a kind of superfluity, is cut off, others think that it denotes contempt of external things, and detachment of the soul from all human cares.

V.—MINOR ORDERS

15.—The office of Porter. After Tonsure the next step is to the order of Porters, whose function it is to guard the keys and doors of the church, and allow no one to enter who is forbidden access to God's temple. Formerly the Porter used to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to see that no one approached too near the altar, or disturbed the priest during the celebration of the divine mysteries. Other duties were also assigned to him, as may be seen from the ceremonies used at his ordination. Thus the bishop, taking the keys from off the altar, hands them to him who is being made Porter, and says to him: "Let your conduct be that of one who has to render to God an account of those things that are kept under these keys."

The greatness of the dignity of this Order in the ancient Church may be inferred from the usage, existing to this day, of regarding the office of Treasurer, who was also the custodian of the sacristy—an office that belonged to the order of Porters—amongst the more honourable functions of the Church.

16.—The Lector. The second degree of Orders is the office of Reader, whose function it is to read in the church, in a clear and distinct voice, the books of the Old and New Testament, and especially those which are read at Matins. Formerly it was also his duty to teach the faithful the first rudiments of the Christian religion. Hence it is that when ordaining him, the bishop, in the presence of the people, hands him a book in which are set down all that regards this function, and says: "Take, and be you a relator of the word of God; if you faithfully and profitably discharge your ministry you shall have a part with those who from the beginning have worthily announced the word of God."

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[1] I Pet. ii. 9.

17.—The Exorcist. The third degree is that of Exorcists, to whom is given the power to invoke the name of the Lord over those who are possessed by unclean spirits, and hence the bishop when ordaining them presents to them a book in which the exorcisms are contained, and at the same time pronounces this form: "Take, and commit to memory, and have the power of imposing hands over the possessed, whether baptized or catechumen."

18.—The Acolyte. The fourth degree is that of Acolytes, and it is the last of the Orders that are called Minor. Their duty is to attend and serve those in Major Orders—the Deacon and Sub-deacon—in the sacrifice of the altar. They also carry and take care of the candles during the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and especially during the reading of the Gospel—hence their other name, torch-bearers. Hence at the ordination of Acolytes the bishop observes the following rite: First of all he carefully warns them of the nature of their office; then hands to each of them a light, saying: "Receive this candlestick and candle, and remember that henceforth you are given the charge of lighting the candles of the church, in the name of the Lord"; then he hands them empty cruets in which are presented the wine and water for the Sacrifice, and says: "Receive these cruets to supply wine and water for the Eucharist of Christ's blood, in the name of the Lord."

VI.—MAJOR ORDERS

19.—The Sub-deacon. Through the Minor Orders, of which we have just now spoken, one lawfully enters and ascends to Major and Holy Orders. Now the first degree of these Major Orders is that of the Sub-deacon whose function, as the name itself indicates, is to serve the Deacon at the altar. He it is who should prepare the altar-linen, the vessels, the bread and wine necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice; he also it is who presents water to the bishop or priest when they wash their hands during the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is also the Sub-deacon who now reads the Epistle which in former times was read at Mass by the Deacon ; and he assists as witness at the Holy Sacrifice, and guards the celebrant from being disturbed by anyone during the sacred ceremonies.

The various duties that pertain to the Sub-deacon are indicated by the solemn ceremonies used at his ordination. In the first place the bishop warns him that the obligation of perpetual continence is attached to the Sub-diaconate, and declares that no one is to be admitted to this Order who is not ready and willing to accept the obligation in question ; then, after the solemn recitation of the Litanies, the bishop enumerates and explains the duties and functions of the Sub-deacon. Thereupon, each one of those who are being ordained receives the chalice and paten from the bishop ; and, to show that he is to serve the Deacon, the Sub-deacon receives from the Arch-deacon cruets filled with wine and water, together with a basin and towel with which to clean the hands. At the same time the bishop pronounces these words : " See what sort of ministry is entrusted to you ; I admonish you, therefore, to show yourself worthy to please God."

Other prayers follow, and finally, when the bishop has clothed the Sub-deacon with the sacred vestments, for each of which there are special words and ceremonies, he gives him the book of the Epistles, saying : " Receive the Book of the Epistles, with power to read them in the Holy Church of God, as well for the living as for the dead."

20.—The Deacon. The second degree of Major Orders is that of the Deacons, whose functions are much more extensive, and have always been regarded as more sacred still. His duty it is to be always at the side of the bishop, guard him while he preaches, serve him and the priest during the celebration of the divine mysteries, as well as during the administration of the sacraments, and to read the Gospel in the Sacrifice of Mass.

In former times he warned the faithful from time to time to be attentive to the holy mysteries ; he administered our Lord's blood in those churches in which the custom existed of receiving the Blessed Eucharist under both species ; and to him was entrusted the distribution of the Church's goods, as well as the duty of providing for all that was necessary to each one's sustenance.

To the Deacon also, as the eye of the bishop, it belongs to see who they are who lead a good and holy life, and who not; who are present at the Holy Sacrifice and sermons at appointed times, and who not; so that he may be able to give an account of all to the bishop, and enable him to admonish and advise each one, either publicly or privately, according as he may deem more profitable. He should also read out the list of the catechumens and present to the bishop those who are to be admitted to Orders. Finally, in the absence of a bishop or priest, he can explain the Gospel, but not from the pulpit, thus letting it be seen that this is not his proper office.

21.—Qualities requisite for the reception of the Diaconate.

The Apostle shows the great care that should be taken that no one unworthy of the Diaconate be promoted to this Order, when in his Epistle to Timothy he sets forth a deacon's character, virtues and integrity. The same point is also gathered from the rites and solemn ceremonies employed in his ordination—the bishop uses longer and more solemn prayers at the ordination of a Deacon than at that of a Sub-deacon, and he also adds other sacred vestments. Moreover, he imposes hands on him, just as we read the Apostles used to do when ordaining the first deacons. Finally, he hands him the Book of the Gospels, with these words: "Receive the power to read the Gospel in the Church of God, both for the living and the dead, in the name of the Lord."

VII.—THE PRIESTHOOD

22.—The dignity of the Priesthood.

The third and highest degree of all the Holy Orders is the Priesthood. The Fathers of the first centuries usually designated those who had received this Order by two names. At one time they call them priests—a Greek word signifying elders—not only because of the ripe years requisite for the reception of this Order, but much more because of their gravity, knowledge and prudence, for is written: *Venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years; but the understanding of a man is grey hairs, and an unspotted life is old age;*[1] at other times they call them *sacerdotes*, both because they are consecrated to God and because to them it belongs to administer the sacraments and take charge of things sacred and divine.

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[1] Wis. iv. 8, 9.

23.—The Priesthood is two-fold—(*a*) internal.

But as Sacred Scripture describes a two-fold Priesthood—one internal and the other external—it will be necessary to have a distinct idea of each to enable the pastor to explain to his flock the nature of the Priesthood now under discussion.

Regarding the internal Priesthood, all the faithful are said to be priests once they have been washed in the saving waters of Baptism. Especially is this name given to the just who have the spirit of God, and who by help of divine grace have been made living members of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ; for, enlightened by faith which is inflamed by charity they offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, on the altar of their hearts. Amongst such sacrifices must be reckoned every good and virtuous action done for the glory of God. Hence we read in the Apocalypse: *Christ hath washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us a kingdom, and priests to God and His Father.*[1] In like manner was it said by the Prince of the Apostles: *Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood,* offering up *spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;*[2] while the Apostle exhorts us *to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service.*[3] And long before this David had said: *A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*[4] All this clearly regards the internal Priesthood.

24.—And (*b*) external.

The external Priesthood, on the contrary, does not pertain to the faithful at large, but only to certain men who have been ordained and consecrated to God by the lawful imposition of hands and by the solemn ceremonies of the Church, and who are thereby devoted to a particular sacred ministry.

This distinction of the Priesthood is noticeable even in the Old Law. That David spoke of the internal Priesthood we have already shown. On the other hand, everyone knows the many and various precepts given by the Lord to Moses and Aaron regarding the external Priesthood. Along with this He appointed the whole tribe of Levi to the ministry of the Temple, and He forbade by law that anyone belonging to another tribe should dare to intrude himself into the sacred functions. Hence it was that King Ozias was afflicted with leprosy for having usurped the sacerdotal ministry, and had to suffer grave chastisements for his arrogance and sacrilege.

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[1] Apoc. i. 5, 6. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 5. [3] Rom. xii. 1. [4] Ps. l. 19.

Now as the same distinction of a two-fold Priesthood may be noted in the New Law, the faithful should be cautioned that what we are now about to say concerns that external Priesthood which is conferred on certain special individuals. This alone belongs to the sacrament of Holy Orders.

VIII.—DEGREES AND DUTIES OF THE PRIESTHOOD

25.—The duties of a priest are outlined in the ordination rite.

The office of a priest, then, is to offer sacrifice to God and administer the sacraments of the Church. This is proved by the very ceremonies used at his ordination:—

When ordaining a priest, the bishop first of all imposes hands on him, as do all the other priests who are present.

Then he puts a stole on his shoulders, and arranges it over his breast in the form of a cross, declaring thereby that the priest is clothed with power from on high, enabling him to carry the Cross of Christ our Lord and the sweet yoke of God's Law, and to inculcate this Law not only by words, but also by the example of a pure and holy life.

He next anoints his hands with holy oil, and then gives him the chalice with wine, and the paten with a host, saying at the same time: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God, and to celebrate Mass, both for the living and for the dead." By these words and ceremonies the priest is constituted an interpreter and mediator between God and man—which indeed is the principal function of the Priesthood.

Lastly, placing his hands a second time on the head of the person being ordained, the bishop says: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained"—thus communicating to him that divine power of forgiving and retaining sin which was given by our Lord to His Apostles. Such, then, are the special and principal functions of the Sacerdotal Order.

26.—The various degrees of the Priesthood

Now although the Sacerdotal Order is one alone, yet it has various degrees of dignity and power:—

The first degree is that of those who are simply called Priests, and of whose functions we have hitherto been speaking.

The second is that of Bishops, who are placed over the various dioceses to govern not only the other ministers of the Church, but the faithful also, and to promote their salvation with supreme vigilance and care. Hence it is that in Sacred Scripture they are often called *Pastors of the sheep*. Their office and duty has been well described by St. Paul in his sermon to the Ephesians, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; while St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, has also laid down a divine rule for the exercise of the episcopal office; and if bishops strive to conform their life and actions according to this rule, there will not be the slightest fear but they will be good pastors and will be esteemed as such. Bishops are also called Pontiffs—a name derived from the pagans, who thus designated their chief priests.

The third degree is that of Archbishops, who preside over a number of bishops and who are called Metropolitans, because they are bishops of those cities which are regarded as the metropolis of their respective provinces. Hence they enjoy greater dignity and more extensive power than bishops, although their ordination is the same.

In the fourth degree come Patriarchs, that is to say, the first and highest of the fathers.

27.—The Patriarchal Sees.

Formerly, besides the Roman Pontiff, there were in the universal Church only four Patriarchs, who, however, were not of equal dignity. Thus the Patriarch of Constantinople though he attained this honour only after all the others, yet he ranked first by reason of the precedence arising from the consideration that Constantinople was the Capital of the Empire. Next in rank came the Patriarch of Alexandria, which Church had been founded by St. Mark the Evangelist by order of the Prince of the Apostles. The third is that of Antioch, where Peter fixed his first See. Finally that of Jerusalem—a See first governed by James, the brother of our Lord.

28.—The primacy of the Roman Pontiff.

Above all these, the Catholic Church has always placed the Supreme Pontiff of Rome, whom Cyril of Alexandria, in the Council of Ephesus, named the Chief Bishop, Father and Patriarch of the whole world. He sits in that chair of Peter in which beyond every shadow of doubt the Prince of the Apostles sat to the end of his days, and hence it is that in him the Church recognizes the highest degree of dignity, and a universality of jurisdiction derived, not from the decrees of men or councils, but from God Himself. Wherefore he is the Father and guide of all the faithful, of all the bishops, of all the prelates, no matter how high their power and office, and as successor of St. Peter, as true and lawful Vicar on earth of Christ our Lord, he governs the universal Church.

29.—The bishop is the minister of the sacrament of Orders.

In accordance with this doctrine, the pastor will instruct the faithful on the principal duties and functions of the various ecclesiastical orders and degrees, as well as on the proper minister of this sacrament.

Beyond all doubt, it is to the bishop that the administration of Orders belongs, as is easily proved by the authority of Holy Scripture, by unbroken tradition, by the testimony of all the Fathers, by the decrees of the Councils, and by the usage and practice of the Church. It is true that permission has been granted to some abbots occasionally to administer Minor Orders; yet there is no doubt whatever that it is the proper office of the bishop and of the bishop alone to confer the Orders called Holy or Major. To ordain Sub-deacons, Deacons and Priests, one bishop suffices; but in accordance with an apostolic tradition, that has been always observed in the Church, bishops are consecrated by three other bishops.

IX.—DISPOSITIONS FOR THE RECEPTION OF ORDERS

30.—Care to be taken to secure worthy candidates for Orders.

We now come to indicate who are fit to receive Orders, especially the Sacerdotal Order, and what are the principal dispositions required of them. From what we shall lay down concerning the dispositions requisite for the Priesthood it will be easy to determine the precautions that should be observed in conferring the other Orders, due account being taken of the office and dignity of each. Now the extreme caution that should be observed in conferring this sacrament is inferred from the fact, that while all the other sacraments impart to those who receive them the graces of personal sanctification and personal advantage, those on the other hand who receive Holy Orders are made partakers of heavenly grace precisely in order that by their ministry they may promote the welfare of the Church and the salvation of all mankind.

Hence we readily understand why it is that ordinations take place only on special days, on which, moreover, in accordance with a very ancient practice of the Church, a solemn fast is appointed in order that by holy and fervent prayer the faithful may obtain from God ministers as fit and as capable as possible of exercising worthily and fruitfully the power conferred by so sublime a ministry.

31.—First quality requisite—integrity of life.

The first quality requisite in him who aspires to the Priesthood is integrity of life and purity of morals. For by procuring or permitting his ordination while conscious of mortal sin, a man renders himself guilty of a new and enormous crime; and not only this, but the priest is bound to give to others the example of a holy and innocent life. In this connexion the pastor will set forth the rules which the Apostle laid down in his letters to Titus and Timothy, and he will also explain that those bodily defects, which by divine command excluded from the service of the altar in the Old Law, should for the most part be understood of deformities of soul in the New Law. This is why the holy custom has been established in the Church, that he who is about to be admitted to Holy Orders should first take great care to cleanse his conscience in the sacrament of Penance.

32. — Knowledge—the second quality requisite.

In the second place there is required in the priest not only that knowledge which concerns the use and administration of the sacraments, but he should also be versed in the science of Sacred Scripture, so as to be able to instruct the people in the mysteries of Christian faith and the precepts of the divine Law, lead them to piety and virtue, and reclaim them from sin. The priest's duties are two-fold—the first is to consecrate and administer the sacraments properly; while the second is to instruct the flock entrusted to him in all that is necessary to salvation. Hence the words of the Prophet Malachias: *The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they* (the people) *shall seek the Law at his mouth; because he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts.*[1]

Now to fulfil the first of these duties it is enough for him to be endowed with a moderate share of knowledge; but as for the second it is no mere ordinary knowledge that is required. At the same time, however, it should be remembered that a profound knowledge of abstruse and difficult questions is not demanded of all priests in an equal degree—it is enough that each one knows all that is necessary for the discharge of his office and ministry.

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[1] Mal. ii. 7.

33.—Certain persons not to be admitted to the Priesthood.

This sacrament should not be conferred on children, nor on the insane or mad, because devoid of the use of reason. Yet, if it does happen to be administered to them, we must unhesitatingly believe that the sacramental character becomes impressed on their souls. As for the precise age requisite for the reception of the various Orders, it will easily be found in the decrees of the Council of Trent.

Slaves also are excluded—he who is not his own master, and who is in the power of another, should not be dedicated to the divine service.

Homicides and men of blood are also rejected, because they are excluded by a Law of the Church and are declared irregular.

The same must be said of all those not born in lawful wedlock—it is only right that those who are dedicated to the divine service should have nothing in them which could expose them to the well-deserved derision or contempt of others.

Finally, the maimed and deformed should not be admitted to Holy Orders—a defect or deformity of this kind cannot but offend the eye and stand in the way of the due administration of the sacraments.

X.—EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF ORDERS

34.—The effects of the sacrament of Orders.

This much being explained, it now remains for the pastor to point out the effects of this sacrament.

(*a*) In the first place it is evident that the sacrament of Orders, while directly concerned, as already explained, with the welfare and beauty of the Church, nevertheless also confers on the soul of him who is ordained the grace of sanctification, fitting and qualifying him for the proper discharge of his functions and for the administration of the sacraments, in the same way as by the grace of Baptism each one is qualified to receive the other sacraments.

(*b*) Another grace is clearly conferred by this sacrament, namely, special power with reference to the Blessed Eucharist—a power which is full and perfect in the priest, because he alone can consecrate the body and blood of our Lord; but which is greater or less in the inferior ministers in proportion as their ministry approaches the Sacrament of the Altar.

This power is also called a spiritual character, because those who have been ordained are distinguished from the rest of the faithful by a certain interior mark, impressed on the soul, by which they are dedicated to the service of God. It is this grace the Apostle seems to have had in view when he said to Timothy: *Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the Priesthood;*[1] and again: *I admonish thee, that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands.*[2]

This much will suffice for the sacrament of Orders. We have aimed at presenting nothing more than the principal points that bear on the subject in order to supply the pastor with sufficient matter for the instruction of his flock, and for their progress in Christian piety.

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[1] 1 Tim. iv. 14.

[2] 2 Tim. i. 6.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

Q. What is the sacrament of Holy Orders ?

A. Holy Orders is a sacrament which gives power to exercise the sacred duties connected with the worship of God and the salvation of souls, and which imprints the character of Minister of God on the soul of him who receives it.

Q. Why is it called Orders ?

A. It is called Orders because it comprises various grades, the one subordinate to the other, from which the sacred Hierarchy is composed.

Q. Which are these grades ?

A. The highest is the *Episcopate*, which contains the fullness of the Priesthood ; then comes the *Priesthood ;* then the *Diaconate*, the *Sub-diaconate*, and the *Orders* called *Minor*.

Q. When did Jesus Christ institute the Sacerdotal Order ?

A. Jesus Christ instituted the Sacerdotal Order at the Last Supper when he conferred on the Apostles and their successors the power of consecrating the Blessed Eucharist. Then on the day of His resurrection He conferred on them the power of remitting and retaining sin, thus constituting them the first Priests of the New Law in all the fullness of their power.

Q. Who is the Minister of this sacrament ?

A. The bishop is the Minister of this sacrament.

Q. Is the dignity of the Christian Priesthood a great dignity ?

A. The dignity of the Christian Priesthood is great indeed, because of the two-fold power which Jesus Christ has conferred upon it—that over His real body and that over His mystical body, or the Church ; and because of the divine mission committed to priests to lead men to eternal life.

Q. Is the Catholic Priesthood necessary in the Church ?

A. The Catholic Priesthood is necessary in the Church, because without it the faithful would be deprived of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and of the greater part of the sacraments ; they would have no one to instruct them in the faith ; and they would be as sheep without a shepherd, a prey to wolves ; in short, the Church, such as Christ instituted it, would no longer exist.

Q. Will the Catholic Priesthood therefore never cease on this earth ?

A. In spite of the war that hell wages against it, the Catholic Priesthood will last until the end of time, because Jesus Christ has promised that the powers of hell shall never prevail against His Church.

Q. Is it a sin to despise Priests ?

A. It is a very grave sin, because the scorn and insults cast on Priests fall upon Jesus Christ Himself, who said to His Apostles : *He who despises you, despises Me.*

Q. What motive should he have who embraces the ecclesiastical state ?

A. The motive of one who embraces the ecclesiastical state should be the glory of God and the salvation of souls alone.

Q. What is necessary to enter the ecclesiastical state ?

A. To enter the ecclesiastical state a divine vocation is necessary before all else.

Q. What should be done to find out whether God calls us to the ecclesiastical state ?

A. To find out if God calls us to

the ecclesiastical state we should: (1) Fervently pray the Lord to make known His will to us; (2) Consult our Bishop or a learned and prudent director; (3) Diligently examine whether we have the capacity necessary for the studies, the duties, and the obligations of this state.

Q. If one were to enter the ecclesiastical state without a divine vocation would he do wrong?

A. If one were to enter the ecclesiastical state without a divine vocation he would commit a great wrong and run the risk of being lost.

Q. Do those parents sin who, from worldly motives, impel their sons to embrace the ecclesiastical state without any vocation?

A. Those parents who, for worldly motives, impel their sons to embrace the ecclesiastical state without any vocation commit a very grave sin, because by thus acting they usurp the right God has reserved to Himself alone of choosing His own ministers; and they expose their children to the danger of eternal damnation.

Q. Which are the duties of the faithful towards those who are called to Holy Orders?

A. The faithful should: (1) Give their children and dependents full liberty to follow the call of God; (2) Pray God to deign to grant good pastors and zealous ministers to His Church—it is precisely for this end that the fasts of Quarter Tense have been instituted; (3) Have special respect for all who are consecrated by Holy Orders to God's service.

Thirty-ninth Instruction on the Sacraments

HOLY ORDERS · ITS INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ having deigned to make use of sensible and material signs, like the sacraments, to communicate His gifts and graces to men, willed also to institute a special sacrament conferring the power to administer the other sacraments to the faithful, offer up the Holy Sacrifice for them, instruct them in the things of heaven, and direct them in the way of salvation. This special sacrament, which is called Holy Orders, enables the persons who receive it to discharge the various sacred functions enumerated just now.

I now propose to speak of this sacrament—a sacrament which in some respects is the most important of all the sacraments, because it is the source of them all. Take away the sacrament of Orders, and you have neither bishops, nor priests, nor sacraments, nor sacrifice. Right well is this understood by the enemies of the Church, who to destroy that Church have often sought, as the readiest means to accomplish their object, to prevent ordinations and interrupt the succession of the Church's ministers—yet always in vain do they oppose their efforts to the designs of God who has willed the succession of His ministers to last as long as the Church He has founded.

Although an extended knowledge of this sacrament particularly concerns those who are about to receive it, or who have already received it, yet it is also very important that all the faithful without exception should receive a certain amount of instruction on this point, sufficient at least to enable them to form a just estimate of the sublime dignity of the Priesthood and hence duly to honour those who are invested with that dignity, co-operate as far as they can towards securing a succession of good and worthy ministers, and especially to hesitate ere they enter this state rashly and without due reflection and preparation, or ere they attempt to induce others to do so. Consequently I shall merely touch on whatever specially regards ecclesiastics, and shall devote almost all my attention to the various considerations that may be of interest to the faithful at large.

In itself the word *order* signifies a certain disposition and arrangement of several superior and inferior things which are grouped in gradation and mutual correspondence, like the steps of a ladder or stairs leading from the ground to a height. In consequence of this, its natural meaning, the word order has been used to signify that sacrament which imprints an indelible character on the soul, consecrating man irrevocably to God, enabling him to perform ecclesiastical functions, and giving him the grace to discharge his office holily. Rightly has this sacrament been called *Orders*, because in it there are several degrees and various subordinate duties, arranged in ascending grades, all of which, however, refer to the Priesthood as the ultimate goal of all the inferior orders which derive therefrom a dignity greater or lesser in proportion as their position with reference to it is near or more remote.

The Priesthood, being a thing all divine, it was necessary, says the Council of Trent, that, to be prepared for it in the best possible manner, ecclesiastics should pass through various successive grades; and accordingly we actually find that there are various grades of orders.

Tonsure is not an order, but a simple preparatory ceremony—an enrolment in the ecclesiastical state. Besides tonsure, there are seven orders, four of which are called *minor* and three *major*, or *sacred*.

The *minor* Orders are those of Porter, Lector, Exorcist, and Acolyte, each of which has its own special duties and functions; yet they are called *minor* because they are only remotely connected with the altar, and involve no irrevocable obligation.

Major or sacred Orders (called thus because immediately connected with the altar and with the Holy Sacrifice, and because they irrevocably consecrate him who is invested with them to the service of God, and the observance of chastity), are, according to the actual discipline of the Church, three in number—Sub-deaconship, Deaconship, and Priesthood.

The Priesthood is, moreover, divided into two grades—the Priesthood of the second degree simply known as the Priesthood, and the Priesthood of the first degree known as the Episcopate, which by divine degree is superior in dignity and power to that of simple priests. Hence the Episcopate is not a distinct Order from that of the Priesthood, but is the complement and perfection of the Priesthood.

Although specifically distinct, these seven Orders, taken altogether, constitute but one sacrament of Holy Orders, conferring grace more or less copiously in proportion as the Order received is more or less elevated.

The six first Orders are all directed to the seventh, that is, the Priesthood, in which all the others are united, which is the noblest of all, and which contains the plenitude of the sacrament. And as a stairs although composed of many and various steps forms but one stairs, so all the different Orders from the lowest to the highest are but one sacrament.

In addition to this the various Orders enumerated just now are not equally of divine institution. The Sub-diaconate and the minor orders were instituted by the Church during the first centuries, to surround her functions with greater dignity by increasing the numbers of her ministers, and to have a better means of assuring herself of their dispositions. The Episcopate, the Priesthood, and the Diaconate are of divine institution, and it is precisely in these three grades that the ecclesiastical hierarchy principally consists.

We here find present that visible sign of invisible grace which is the distinctive feature of all the sacraments. The visible sign consists in the imposition of hands by the bishop at the ordination of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops, along with a prayer proper to each order. This sign, moreover, produces certain supernatural effects, which effects are three in number—character, power, and grace.

1. The first effect of the sacrament of Holy Orders is to produce in the soul a spiritual, indelible mark, which we call *character*, and which can never be effaced. Like a brilliant star glittering between two less brilliant stars, the character of Orders shines between that of Baptism and Confirmation, on the soul of him who is ordained, constituting him God's minister, distinguishing him and separating him from the mass of the people, and placing him, says St. Paul, in a special class apart from all others: *For every high-priest taken from men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God.*[1]

2. Along with the sacerdotal character is received the power of exercising sacred functions—a power pertaining to those alone who have received Orders—and this is the second effect of the sacrament. Observe, that even in civil society there are certain functions which cannot be exercised indiscriminately by all, and which are reserved to those invested with this power by public authority. Thus the care of deeds and wills is entrusted to specially constituted officials, and a document deficient in the legal requirements is regarded as null and void. Now, the same power as is thus received in temporal matters in virtue of a purely exterior delegation, is received by us with regard to spiritual matters, in virtue of an intrinsic inherent character conferred on us by the sacrament of Orders—the power, that is to say, of administering the sacraments, offering the Divine Sacrifice, preaching the Gospel, and instructing and governing the people.

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[1] Heb. v. 1.

This power comes from Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, who after having Himself received it from His Father, communicated it in the beginning directly to His Apostles without using ordination ceremonies. He gave them the power to preach the Gospel when He said to them: *Go ye and teach all nations;* the power to administer the sacraments when He added: *Baptizing them,* etc., and *whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them;* and finally the power to offer the Holy Sacrifice when He said: *Do this for a commemoration of Me.* But as the ministry was necessary as long as the Church was to last, He gave to His Apostles the faculty and the command to transmit that power to others by means of ordination. And this in fact we find the Apostles straightway did—hardly had Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, when, assembling all together, they ordained St. Mathias in place of the traitor Judas; and in proportion as the Christian religion began to spread, they everywhere ordained bishops and priests.

3. Yet, while the power received in this sacrament is indeed sufficient for the valid exercise of the sacred functions, it by no means is all that is required to do so worthily and lawfully. For this there is necessary a special grace enabling us to discharge them holily, religiously, and with advantage to ourselves and to others. Now this grace is precisely the third and last effect of the sacrament of Orders, an effect which is always produced in those who put no voluntary obstacle in the way of its reception. There is this great difference between the power and the grace conferred by the sacrament of Orders that all those who are ordained, even those who are unworthy, receive the power along with the character; and consequently an unworthy bishop validly ordains, and an unworthy priest validly consecrates and absolves; whereas grace is conferred on those alone who receive the sacrament with the requisite dispositions.

What, then, are the dispositions required for the worthy reception of the sacrament of Orders? The first proximate disposition is freedom from every mortal sin, in other words the state of grace; the sacrament of Orders increases grace—it does not confer it in the first instance.

A second and fundamental disposition is a vocation, or call from God—a vocation which is sufficiently revealed by the presence of those qualities that constitute the true ecclesiastical spirit—competent knowledge, upright life, love of labour, study and prayer, detachment from the world and from all its vanities.

A vocation which is necessary in fact for every state of life, is much more necessary for the ecclesiastical state, in consequence of the dignity and excellence of that state and the intrinsic nature of its functions, which have no other aim than the worship of God and the salvation of souls—a vocation which is so indispensable that even were we to imagine that God had left the choice of all other states to the free will of man He would still have reserved to Himself the choice of His ministers, as an affair all His own, and specially concerning Him. Where, in fact, is the sovereign to be found who would not wish to select his own ministers, his own ambassadors, his own special officials to watch over his own interests.

To encroach on the sacred functions without being called by God would, consequently, be a sacrilege and a rash act of usurpation. What should be said of a man who would set himself up as minister or ambassador of a king without his authority and delegation ? What should be said of a man who would set himself up as your accredited agent, without any authority from you, and who would enter into contracts and bargains in your name ? Would not such a course of action be at once set down as utterly barefaced and unwarrantable. And if so, how is it possible to form a different judgment in the case of the most delicate and most important duty that can be entrusted by God to men ?

The worst of all is that one who embraces this state against the designs and will of God can hardly fail to effect his own ruin, simply because he forfeits all right to the graces necessary to enable him properly to discharge the duties and obligations of that state—for in such cases it is not God who imposes these duties and obligations. The result is the privation of the necessary graces—a result that involves the ruin both of him who receives the ministry, and of those for whom he exercises it.

From all this, it should be concluded that the ordination of the ministers of the Church is by no means a matter of indifference to you, but is a matter of the highest importance, and an affair that specially interests you. The effect of the other sacraments is limited to those who receive them, whereas the effect of the sacrament of Orders extends to all the Church. The grace poured forth in this sacrament into the heart of the priest is to be poured back over all mankind and redound to the general good of all. Now, what can be of greater interest to you than this ? If it is your interest to choose a good physician to take care of the health of your body, good advocates to defend your case, good magistrates to administer justice, how can it fail to be of the highest interest to you to have good ministers assigned to you to direct you along the path that leads to eternal salvation ?

Priests, says Jesus Christ in the Gospel, are the salt of the earth ; but if salt becomes insipid, of what use is it ? Priests He continues.

are the light of the world; now if their light is hidden under a bushel it can no longer enlighten the earth. In these comparisons Jesus Christ desired to signify the influence exercised by priests over the salvation or the damnation of the people. One of the greatest scourges threatened by God in punishment of the prevarication of His people was neither war, nor famine, nor pestilence, but it was to give them bad pastors—to abandon them to faithless guides who would lead them to ruin.

So far, so well, you may say, but what influence can lay people have over the ordination of priests? Your influence can, on the contrary, be great, and can be exercised in various ways.

1. By your prayers: *Pray the Lord of the harvest that He may send labourers to His harvest.* Nay, one of the ends for which the Church has established the fasts and prayers of Quarter Tense is to obtain the blessing of God on the ordination of His priests which usually takes place on these occasions. Unite your prayers, then, to those of the Church, and do not be niggardly in observing the prescribed fasts and abstinences for so important a purpose. What great good do not a few zealous labourers and a small number of true apostles accomplish daily in the Lord's vineyard in procuring God's glory, and preventing offences being committed against Him! And how much more could be done if they were only more numerous! Pray the Lord, then, to send labourers into His vineyard.

2. You can also exercise influence over ordination by conveying opportune information to the proper authorities. Why does the Church publish from the altar on stated days the names of candidates for Orders? Is this a mere ceremony? Assuredly not—the Church intends thereby to interrogate the people with reference to the life the character, and the qualities of aspirants, and to oblige the faithful to denounce those whom they know to be unworthy. Candidates may have contracted bad habits, which have come to your knowledge, but which are completely unknown to the bishop or parish priest; and in such a case you can, nay you should, reveal the danger, and thus enable the bishop to take whatever steps he may deem necessary. Do not allow yourself to be restrained by the fear of attracting hatred, or displeasure, or prejudice, or contradiction—no such consideration should be permitted to weigh with you in a matter of such tremendous importance.

3. Finally, if you can do nothing else you can at least be careful, as far as lies in your power, not to contribute in any way to the intrusion of unworthy persons into the ecclesiastical state. For instance, you are the head of a family and of a number of children. It may easily happen that various worldly motives and considerations may

tend to induce you to intrude one of your children into the sanctuary, without any indication that he has been called by God. Be carefully on your guard against thus abusing your authority, and becoming guilty of so great a crime. It would be an act of usurpation against God whose rights and authority you thus arrogate, as well as a sin of injustice against your children from whom you take away the liberty that God has willed should be inviolable in the matter of vocation—an injustice, moreover, that involves the most baneful consequences to them, since it exposes them to the danger of being lost in a life which is not theirs—an injustice ruinous to the Church which has suffered untold damage from the intrusion of unworthy ministers.

Reflect well on this. God has not entrusted the souls of your children to you to enable you to turn them aside from the path of salvation. Your first duty, a duty more important than their rearing and support, is to endeavour to secure their salvation, and this you do above all by directing them along the way to which God has called them—not along that which pleases you and suits your temporal interests. You should certainly help them to make a choice, and supply for their want of experience; but you should not decide, nor constrain them to embrace whatever state you decide on. Take time, seek advice, recommend the matter to God, and He will enlighten you and crown your efforts with success.

Fortieth Instruction on the Sacraments

THE DIGNITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF ORDERS

In my last instruction I explained the sacrament of Orders—so far, at least, as is called for in the case of a sacrament which concerns priests rather than you. I do not consider it necessary to enter into the details of the different functions attached to each of the various Orders; I cannot, however, omit to speak of the dignity, the greatness, and the excellence of the Priesthood to which all the other orders are referred—it will be necessary to do so in order to enable you to estimate at their proper value those who are daily found to undervalue and throw contempt on the Priesthood and on priests.

This failing is more serious than is commonly imagined—it is a failing that either presupposes the total loss of faith, or at least leads almost infallibly to its being lost. For there can be no religion without worship, and there can be no worship without ministers; and it is impossible for ministers who are not held in honour to serve the purpose for which they have been ordained. Hence, to preserve us from so great an evil, God in His infinite wisdom expressly and strictly lays down the rule forbidding us to separate the honour due to Him from the honour to be rendered to His ministers: *Honour God with all thy soul, and give honour to the priests; With all thy soul fear the Lord and reverence His priests.*

The subject would be very long in itself; but in order not to exceed the limits of an instruction I shall confine myself to a few considerations that will be sufficient for our purpose.

Nothing can convey a higher idea of the dignity than the words addressed by our Lord Jesus Christ to His Apostles when investing them with the sacerdotal character: *As the living Father hath sent Me, so I also send you.*[1] Let us weigh well the force of these words: The Eternal Father sends His divine Son into the world to save it; and for this purpose He gives Him the amplest powers: *All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth;*[2] and this divine Son having accomplished the designs of His Father, and being about to ascend into heaven, commissions His priests to continue His work down to the end of time; makes them His vicars on earth, His co-operators in the salvation of the world, the interpreters of the will of God, advocates of His mercy, mediators between Him and man, the dispensers of His graces, the depositories of His holy mysteries; and therefore, in various ways, He communicates to them that divine power which was His alone: *As the living Father hath sent Me, so I also send you.* What, then, can be more honourable than the Priesthood, which in dignity and power is nothing else than the very Priesthood of Jesus Christ, delegated and entrusted and transmitted to us in ordination?

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[1] John vi. 58.

[2] Matt. xxviii. 18.

Let us dwell a little on the two powers, truly divine, possessed by priests—that over Christ's mystic body, which is the Church or the congregation of all the faithful; and that still more wonderful power over Christ's real body in the Blessed Eucharist.

Regarding the first; *Whatsoever,* said Jesus Christ, *you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven*—words which convey the divine power possessed by priests of remitting sins, even though they themselves still remain weak, frail, and sinful men.

What power can be more marvellous than this? You do not, perhaps, take much account of it, because you see it exercised daily and hourly—nay, possibly, when you see the priest raising his hand to absolve a sinner you may be inclined to exclaim with the Pharisees: *Who can remit sins unless God alone?* But what would be your wonder if you could only look into the soul of the sinner, and gaze on the wonderful change wrought therein at the moment of absolution? Hardly has the priest pronounced the authoritative words: "I absolve thee from thy sins," words of such power and efficacy that the shameful bonds of sin by which the sinner is held by the demon are burst asunder, and the soul which was blacker than coal is made white as the lily or the driven snow; he who was the slave of the devil becomes all at once the child of God; hell that yawned beneath his feet is closed; and the gates of heaven are thrown wide open above his head. Great is this power—so great that outside God there is nothing like it on earth or in heaven.

In order to form a still more striking idea of this power, picture to yourself an unfortunate man struck by a mortal wound as he journeys along the road. He is about to breathe his last; and remembering the sins he has committed and the miserable state of his soul, he is seized with terror and dread at the sight of hell that is about to engulf him ere many moments have passed. Who can be of any use to him in his terrible plight? All the kings and rulers of the earth may draw near—not one of them has power to break the chains that bind his soul; all the saints and angels of heaven may be present—they can pray for him, but they cannot wipe away his sins; nay, the very Mother of God, powerful as she is, can indeed become his mediatrix with God, but she cannot remit his sins.

But let a priest draw nigh, and all is changed; let him but pronounce the words "I absolve thee from thy sins" over the penitent dying man, and on the instant he is restored to the grace of God; snatched from the abyss that yawned ready to receive him; and is rendered worthy of eternal bliss.

In a word: in that great moment, when the whole wide world cannot be of the slightest use to us, we need but the hand of the priest to enable us to die fearlessly and tranquilly. As it is the consciousness of sins alone that renders death terrible, so only the hand that has power to remit sins can rob death of its terrors. Now, the only hand that has this power is the hand of him to whom was said: *Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.*

In a word, in virtue of this power the priest is constituted God's plenipotentiary to conclude peace between Him and the offending sinner; he is made the arbiter of God's mercy; and from his sentence there is no appeal—God has bound Himself to ratify in heaven the sentence pronounced by the priest on earth: *Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.*

Marvellous as is this power, however, it is small in comparison with that other power which Jesus Christ has conferred on each of His priests with regard not merely to His mystic body, but over His real body. That very body, which was indissolubly united to the person of the Eternal Word; which with infinite wisdom was formed by the Holy Ghost to be the temple of the Divinity, and in the formation of which the Blessed Virgin contributed her most pure blood—that body, once passable and mortal, but now glorious, impassible, and immortal, is the very body over which priests extend their dominion, and their power; and not only over the body, but over the whole person of Jesus Christ, simply because to that body are inseparably united His soul and His divinity.

And how? By the power of consecrating which they have received from Jesus Christ Himself: *Do this in commemoration of Me.* What, in fact, is it the priest accomplishes at the altar in the middle of Mass, when he bows profoundly over the host and chalice? He calls God Himself before him by the tremendous words of consecration; he invites God into the host and chalice; he commands Him to descend from heaven; and at the sound of these few words God, that God to whom all is subject and from whom all depends, places Himself in the priest's hands, and gives Himself to him unreservedly, so much so that the priest can freely touch Him, offer Him. eat Him, and distribute Him to others. What a wondrous power is not this! Now if, to use the expression of the Fathers, it was a marvellous prodigy for the Blessed Virgin to bring down the Eternal Word from heaven to become incarnate in her womb, by the simple words: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it done unto me according to thy word ;* does not a prodigy equally marvellous take place on the utterance by the priest of the few words: *This is My body ; this is My blood ?*—the self-same Divine Word, not once alone, but day after day, descends into the priest's hands, is reproduced, or to be more correct, is re-incarnated anew. "O wondrous the dignity of priests," cries out St. Cyprian, "in whose hands the Son of God is incarnated."

Such, then, is the sublime dignity of the Priesthood, as far at least as we can measure it with our poor intellect. Such, then, is the two-fold divine power, that raises the priest above angels and saints—no mere accidental power which can be revoked at will, but an intrinsic power essentially belonging to him in virtue of a special consecration and of a shining and ineffaceable seal stamped on his soul, rendering his priestly dignity eternal.

Now, what conclusion are we to draw from all this? That priests, being as they are Christ's representatives, should imitate their divine Model by a pure, stainless and little less than angelic life—such is the conclusion that each priest ought to draw for himself; and that there is nothing more worthy of respect on earth than the priestly character—such is the conclusion that you should draw. And truly, if in the eyes of faith there is no function so sacred as that exercised by Jesus Christ on earth; and if His functions have been transmitted to priests and are perpetuated in them; in fine, if in virtue of these same functions, priests become sharers in His divine power and authority, does it not follow that you should regard them exactly as you would regard Jesus Christ, were He to dwell visibly in your midst? and does it not also follow that the honour you give to them is given also to the divine Founder of the Priesthood, just as the denial of respect to them involves disrespect to Him?

In any event, this conclusion is not mine—it is our Saviour Himself, who speaking to His Apostles has said: *He that heareth you heareth Me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me,*[1] thus showing us that the honour due to Him, and the honour due to His priests, are in no way different, but amount to one and the self-same thing.

The saints, who were assuredly penetrated by a lively faith, and who perfectly understood the sacerdotal character, have left us signal instances of their esteem for the Priesthood, as is shown by the example of St. Antonius, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, and many others.

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[1] Luke x. 16.

Never, perhaps, has the Priesthood been more despised and reviled than in our own days, and that even by those who boast of their attachment to the faith, to religion, and to the Church.

That unbelievers and libertines have only aversion and contempt for priests is not surprising; how could it be otherwise? Their evil life, which leads them to hate religion, must necessarily lead them to hate the ministers who preach, promote, and defend that religion. Nay, it is no small triumph for this religion and for its ministers, not unfrequently to see these unhappy men when their last hour is at hand eagerly call for the priest, earnestly beg his prayers, and become closely attached to that very body they had hitherto hated so heartily—an evident proof that the aversion once displayed by them did not spring from a true and solid conviction, but only from evil life, depraved hearts, and corrupt will.

Far worse is it to see the contempt towards priests that is only too widespread amongst many who are not completely unbelieving or irreligious. Many of this particular class have not the slightest respect for priests, judge them rashly, speak ill of them—more readily of them, in fact, than of any other class—make them the object of their jibes, and jokes, and satirical remarks. Many causes have contributed to this attitude, but they do not depend on ourselves, and there is no need to mention them here. I shall merely draw attention to the specious motive usually alleged in justification of their line of action—that is to say, the disedifying conduct of some priests who lead a life little in conformity with their sacred character. Now, does this reason excuse or justify the attitude referred to? I cannot think so.

First of all, it is unfair and unjust to lose respect and esteem for a whole class simply because certain members are not what they should be. Did such reasons suffice there is no condition or profession which would not deserve to be despised and derided; for in all states and in all conditions are to be found men of evil and contemptible life and conduct. Are all married persons chaste and faithful? Are all business-men upright and honest? Are all judges incorruptible? Are all those of your own rank and condition irreproachable? Assuredly not. Is it, then, just to attack all because of the evil conduct of a few? And if it is evidently unjust to do so in the case of other conditions of life, how can we regard it as less unjust in the case of the priests of the Church?

There is no state without its stains. The angels sinned in heaven, Adam and Eve in the state of innocence, St. Peter and Judas in the very school of Jesus Christ; and God permits this in order to let us see that in all places and in all professions as long as we are exiles on earth we are exposed to the danger of falling. Yet this is no reason why we should despise such states or conditions. Even though the conduct of a few is calculated to inspire contempt you cannot without injustice extend that contempt to the whole sacerdotal order—if there are priests to be found unworthy of their sacred character, lazy, effeminate, worldly, more worldly even than lay men, there are, thank God, countless others who lead a mortified life, who are exemplary, energetic, indefatigable, who labour with all zeal to work out their own salvation and that of their neighbour, and are such as the Gospel demands—shining lights shedding all round the vivifying rays of zeal and holiness.

I go still further and I say that not even to bad priests should disrespect be shown. In the priest we have to consider two things—the man and the dignity. If the man does not deserve our respect his sacred character certainly does; for sin or defect does not destroy the divine character of the Priesthood which ever remains, and which always suffices to enforce our respect. Be a priest as bad as may be he never ceases to be a priest, God's minister, Christ's lieutenant; nor does he become incapable of administering the most important functions of his ministry. Now, on what do I base the obligation of respecting the priest? Not on his conduct, which depends altogether on himself, and which may become very bad, but on his dignity which comes from God, which is inherent in his person, and which he can never alienate or destroy. This is the reason relied on by the Lord when He said: *Touch ye not My anointed.*[1] By this precept He did not merely intend to protect and defend good priests, but also those who do not prove themselves such—in a word, all without exception, simply because all are anointed and consecrated as His ministers.

I do not, however, mean to assert that the sins of a priest are not enormous in him who commits them, and revolting to those who witness them. But I do say that you should not make this a reason for being scandalized, and much less should it cause you to lose respect for the clergy as a body. Quite the contrary, considering that it is only too easy to pass from contempt of things sacred to contempt of religion itself. He who has no respect for the livery of a great personage can have no respect for the person himself.

Stir up your faith, therefore; recognize in the priest a prodigy of divine power, and regard him with the eye of religious veneration. The advice and instruction given by the Holy Ghost to children regarding the respect they owe their parents, and the admonitions not to ridicule them, despise them or accentuate their weaknesses and failings, should also serve as the rule of our conduct towards priests who have a still higher claim to the title of *father*, since it is they who regenerate us to grace by means of the sacraments, and who thus finally regenerate us to life immortal and bliss unending.

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[1] Ps. civ. 15.

In conclusion, call to mind that in the hour of death you will look upon it as a great happiness and consolation to have a priest near you, to listen to your sins, absolve you, and remain beside you to comfort you in your agony, and help you to die a holy death. Mindful of this, hold them in high esteem during your life, lest in punishment of your want of respect for them God should permit you to invoke their assistance in vain in that hour of your greatest need.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

THE ROMAN CATECHISM (PART II)

1.—The nature of the sacrament of Matrimony should be carefully explained.

As the end and aim of the pastor's labours must ever be the happiness and perfection of his flock, his most ardent desire should be that expressed by the Apostle in his letter to the Corinthians in which he says: *I would that you all were even as myself*,[1] that is to say, that all should strive to practise the virtue of continency. No greater happiness can befall the faithful in this life than to have their souls distracted by no worldly cares, their evil desires repressed and subdued, and their thoughts and intentions fixed on the sole study of piety, and on the contemplation of the things of heaven.

But as, according to the testimony of the same Apostle, *everyone hath his proper gift from God, one after this manner and another after that;*[2] as marriage is adorned with many heavenly blessings, so much so that it is truly and really numbered amongst the sacraments of the Catholic Church; and as our Lord deigned to honour the celebration of marriage by His presence—all this abundantly proves that the subject should be carefully explained, especially in view of the fact that St. Paul and the Prince of the Apostles have in several passages accurately committed to writing not only all that pertains to the dignity but also all that concerns the duties of the married state. Inspired with the spirit of God they thoroughly comprehended the immense advantages to be derived by Christianity at large if the faithful only knew and inviolably preserved the holiness of the state of Matrimony; whilst on the other hand they saw the many serious losses and calamities that would be brought upon the Church by ignorance or neglect of the sanctity of that state.

Accordingly the nature and qualities of marriage must be first explained. Vice often bears the semblance of virtue, and hence care must be taken to prevent the faithful from being deceived by a false appearance of marriage, and thus staining their souls with sin and filthy passions. In explaining this subject it will be advisable to begin by setting forth the meaning of the word itself.

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 7.

[2] 1 Cor. vii. 7.

I.—DEFINITION AND NATURE OF MARRIAGE

2.—**Why called Matrimony.**

The word *matrimony* is derived from the fact that the principal object a woman should have in marrying is to become a mother; or from the fact that a mother's duty is to conceive, bring forth, and train up children.

It is also called *conjugal union*, because of the fact that a lawful wife is united to her husband by one single indivisible bond.

Finally it is called *nuptials*, because brides veiled themselves through modesty, as St. Ambrose remarks, implying thereby that they must be obedient and subject to their husbands.

3.—**Matrimony defined.**

By the common accord of theologians, Matrimony is defined to be: "The conjugal union of man and woman contracted between two qualified persons, which obliges them to live together all the days of their lives."

To understand the various parts of this definition thoroughly. it should be remarked that even though many things go to constitute a perfect Marriage—internal consent, external compact expressed in words, the obligation and bond arising from that compact, and marital intercourse consummating Matrimony—yet of all these the only one that, strictly speaking, has the force and nature of Marriage is the obligation and bond indicated by the word *union*.

The word *conjugal* is added, to denote that all other sorts of contract, by which men and women bind themselves to help and assist each other in consideration of payment received or for any other reason, are essentially different from the nature of Matrimony.

Then follow the words *between qualified persons*, to show that those absolutely excluded by law from conjugal union cannot contract Matrimony; and that if they do, the Marriage is invalid. For instance, relatives down to the fourth degree of kindred, a youth under fourteen, or a girl under twelve years of age—ages determined by the Laws of the Church—cannot contract Matrimony validly.

The concluding words, *obliging them to live together all the days of their lives,* denote the nature of the inseparable tie by which husband and wife are bound.

4.—The essence of Marriage consists in the marriage-tie.

Hence it follows that the nature and essence of Marriage consist in the tie to which we have referred. And though the definitions given by some eminent theologians seem to make its essence consist in the consent—as, for instance, when they say that Matrimony is the consent of the man and woman—they must be understood to mean that the consent itself is the efficient cause of Matrimony, as the Fathers laid down in the Council of Florence; an obligation and tie cannot exist without consent and contract.

5.—The nature of the consent required in Matrimony.

It is most necessary that the consent be expressed in words denoting present time. Marriage is no mere simple donation, but a mutual compact, and consequently the consent of one alone is not enough to constitute a Marriage—the mutual consent of both parties is essential. Now to manifest this mutual consent it is evident that words are required.

For if Matrimony could arise from mere internal consent, without any external manifestation, it would seem to follow that if two persons, living in different and distant countries, were to have the will to marry each other, they would be really and permanently married, even before mutually making known their consent by letter or otherwise—a conclusion contrary to reason, and in conflict with the usage and ordinances of the Church.

6.—Mutual consent expressed in terms of the future is not enough to constitute Marriage.

Advisedly is it said that it is necessary for the consent to be expressed in words of the present tense. Words couched in the future tense simply signify a promise, but do not actually unite in Matrimony. Besides this, it is evident that what is to take place in the future does not yet exist and what does not yet exist must be regarded as of very little permanence and stability. Hence a man who has only promised to marry a certain woman acquires thereby no connubial rights with regard to her, since what has been promised has not yet been performed. At the same time he is bound to keep his engagement, and were he to do otherwise he becomes guilty of breach of faith.

On the other hand, once a man has contracted a matrimonial alliance, he may indeed regret the step, but he can no longer hope to change or nullify or undo it.

The obligation arising from Marriage, therefore, is no mere promise, but a transfer of right, and is made on such conditions that the man hands over the dominion of his body to the woman and the woman the dominion of her body to the man, and hence it is necessary that it must be formulated in words of the present tense—words the effect of which abides even after they are pronounced, binding husband and wife in a bond that can never be broken.

7.—In certain cases the words may be replaced by a nod or sign.

Instead of words, however, a nod or sign clearly indicating internal consent is sufficient—nay, even silence, arising from modesty on the part of the bride, would suffice, provided her parents make answer for her.

8.—The essence of Marriage consists in the Marriage-tie.

From all this the pastor will explain to his flock that the essence and force of Marriage consists in the bond or tie; that consent expressed in the manner indicated is sufficient; and that to effect true Matrimony consummation is not necessary. Our first parents previous to their fall were certainly united in Matrimony, and yet, as the Fathers testify, no carnal intercourse had taken place between them. Hence the dictum of the Fathers that Marriage consists not in its use, but in the consent,—a doctrine we find repeated by St. Ambrose in his book *De Virginibus*.

9.—Matrimony to be considered under a two-fold aspect.

All this being explained, it should be shown that Matrimony has a two-fold aspect—as a natural union (it was not invented by man but instituted by nature), or as a sacrament the efficacy of which transcends the natural order of things. And as grace perfects nature, and as *that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; afterwards that which is spiritual,*[1] order demands that we should first treat Matrimony as a natural contract and as productive of natural obligations. Afterwards we shall speak of its properties under its sacramental aspect.

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[1] 1 Cor. xv. 46.

II.—MATRIMONY AS A NATURAL CONTRACT

10.—God the author of Matrimony.

In the first place the faithful should be taught that Matrimony was instituted by God. We read in Genesis: *Male and female He created them; and God blessed them saying: Increase and multiply.*[1] Again: *It is not good for man to be alone; let Us make him a help like unto himself.*[2] And a little further on: *But for Adam there was not found a helper like himself. Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and when he was fast asleep, He took one of his ribs and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam; and Adam said: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man; wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh.*[3] —words which, according to the testimony of our Lord in St. Matthew, prove the divine institution of Matrimony.

11. — Matrimony cannot be dissolved.

And not only is God the author of Marriage, but He also, as the Council of Trent declares, made it a perpetual and indissoluble union. It is our Saviour Himself who says: *What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*[4]

But though indissolubility is a property of Matrimony even in its natural aspect, yet it is especially so in its sacramental aspect, just as it is its sacramental character that, in all its natural relations, elevates it to the highest perfection. In any event the idea of its dissolubility is at variance with the rearing up of offspring and the other objects of Marriage.

12.—The words *increase and multiply* are not obligatory on every individual.

As regards our Lord's words: *Increase and multiply*, their object is to declare the end for which Marriage was instituted, and not to impose an obligation on each and every individual. Now that the human race has been multiplied as it is, not only is there no law compelling each one to marry, but on the contrary, virginity is highly exalted and commended in Sacred Scripture as superior to the married state, and as involving greater perfection and holiness. This is the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Himself: *He that can receive it, let him receive it;*[5] while the Apostle declares: *Con-*

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[1] Gen. i. 27, 28. [2] Gen. ii. 18. [3] Gen. ii. 21, 24. [4] Matt. xix. 6. [5] Matt. xix. 12.

cerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give counsel, as having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be faithful.[1]

III.—THE MOTIVES AND ENDS OF MARRIAGE

We have now to explain the reasons why Marriage was instituted :—

13.—Why Marriage was instituted.

(*a*) The first reason is that this companionship of both sexes is sought by natural instinct, and is encouraged by the prospect of mutual help, founded on the hope of each being assisted by the other to support life's burthens and bear the infirmities of old age with greater ease.

(*b*) A second reason is the desire of having children, not so much with a view to having heirs to property and possessions, as to training them up to be true and faithful servants of God. That this was the principal object of the holy Patriarchs in marrying is clear from Sacred Scripture. And hence, when showing Tobias how to repel the violence of the evil demon, the Angel said : *I will show thee who they are over whom the devil can prevail ; for they who in such manner receive Matrimony as to shut out God from themselves and from their mind and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding ; over them the devil hath power.*[2] And the Angel adds : *Thou shalt take the virgin with the fear of the Lord, moved rather for love of children than for lust, that in the seed of Abraham thou mayest obtain a blessing in children.*

Such in fact was the one sole reason why God instituted Marriage from the beginning. And hence it follows that great, indeed, is the guilt of those married persons who artificially hinder conception or procure abortion—their crime can be regarded as nothing less than wilful conspiracy to murder.

14.—Special reason induced by the fall of our first parents.

(*c*) To these two reasons is added a third, in consequence of the fall of our first parents. On account of the loss of original justice in which man had been created, passion began to rebel against right reason, and hence he who is conscious of his weakness and is not prepared to combat the flesh is supplied by Marriage with an antidote against impurity. On this point the Apostle thus writes : *Because of fornication let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own*

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 25.

[2] Tob. vi. 16, 17.

husband.[1] Then, after having laid it down that it was well occasionally to abstain from the marriage-debt for the sake of prayer, he adds: *Return together again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency.*

These, then, are the various motives, one or other of which those who desire to contract Marriage in a good and holy manner, as becomes the children of the saints, should have in view.

If, however, other motives should contribute to induce men to marry, and, when choosing a wife, to prefer one person to another, such for instance as the desire to leave an heir behind them, or considerations of wealth, beauty, noble family, pleasing disposition, these and similar considerations are not blameworthy, since they are not inconsistent with the holiness of Marriage, Holy Writ does not blame the Patriarch Jacob, for having preferred Rachel to Lia, because of her beauty. Thus far regarding Matrimony as a natural union.

IV.—MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT

15.—As a sacrament Marriage is far superior to the natural contract.

It will now be necessary to explain that Matrimony is far superior in its sacramental aspect and aims at an incomparably higher end.

For as Marriage, as a natural union, was instituted from the beginning to propagate the human race; so was the sacramental dignity subsequently conferred upon it in order that a people might be begotten and brought up for the service and worship of the true God and of Christ our Saviour.

Thus when Christ our Lord desired to exemplify the intimate union that exists between Him and His Church, as well as His immense love for us, He instanced especially the sacred union of man and wife. How apt was the example will readily appear from the fact that of all human relations there is none that binds so closely as the marriage-tie, and from the fact that husband and wife are bound to one another by the bonds of affection and love. Hence it is that Holy Writ so frequently represents to us the divine union of Christ and the Church under the figure of Marriage.

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 2.

16.—Marriage is a true sacrament (*a*) it is a sacred sign.

That Marriage is a sacrament, the Catholic Church, following the authority of the Apostle, has always held to be certain and incontestable. In his Epistle to the Ephesians he writes: *Men should love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hateth his own flesh, but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church* (*for we are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones*). *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall adhere to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.*[1] Now his expression *a great sacrament* undoubtedly refers to Matrimony, and must be taken to mean that the union of man and wife—a union of which God is the Author—is a sacrament, that is, a sacred sign of that most holy union that binds Christ our Lord to His Church.

That this is the true and proper meaning of the Apostle's words is shown by all the Fathers who have interpreted them, and by the explanation furnished by the Council of Trent. It is indubitable, therefore, that the Apostle compares the husband to Christ, and the wife to the Church; that *the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church*;[2] and that for this very reason the husband should love his wife and the wife love and respect her husband: *For Christ loved His Church, and gave Himself for her*;[3] while, as the same Apostle teaches, *the Church is subject to Christ.*[4]

17.—(*b*) and both signifies and confers grace.

That grace is also signified and conferred by this sacrament—two properties that constitute the principal characteristics of each sacrament—is expressly declared by the Council as follows: "By His passion Christ, the Author and Perfecter of the venerable sacraments, merited for us the grace that perfects the natural love of husband and wife, confirms the indissoluble union existing between them, and sanctifies them." It should, therefore, be shown that the effect of the grace produced by this sacrament is to unite husband and wife in the bonds of mutual love, cherish in them mutual affection, hinder them from all illicit attachments and passions, and so keep their Marriage *honourable in all things, and their bed undefiled.*[5]

18.—Is superior to the marriages that preceded the New Law.

How much the sacrament of Matrimony is superior to the marriages made both previous to and under the Mosaic Law may be judged from the fact that though the Gentiles themselves were convinced there was something divine in Marriage, and for that reason regarded promiscuous intercourse as contrary to the law of nature, while they also considered fornication, adultery, and other kinds of libertinage to be punishable offences; yet their marriages never had any sacramental value.

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[1] Eph. v. 28, 32 [2] Eph. v. 23. [3] Eph. v. 25. [4] Eph. v. 24. [5] Heb. xiii. 4.

Among the Jews, the laws regulating Marriage were observed with deep religious respect, and it cannot be doubted that their unions were endowed with some degree of sanctity. As they had received from God the promise that in the seed of Abraham all nations should be blessed, it was justly considered by them to be a very pious duty to bring forth children and thus contribute to the propagation of the chosen people from whom Christ the Lord and Saviour was to derive His birth in His human nature. Still their unions also fell short of the real nature of a sacrament.

19.—By the sin of our first parents Marriage fell from its primitive dignity.

It should be added that if we consider the Law of Nature and the Law of Moses we shall find that after the fall of our first parents Matrimony fell away from its original honour and purity. Thus, under the Law of Nature, we read of many of the ancient Patriarchs that they had several wives at the same time; while, under the law of Moses, it was permissible on certain grounds to repudiate one's wife by giving her a bill of divorce. Both these liberties have been suppressed by the Law of the Gospel, and Marriage restored to its original state.

Though some of the ancient Patriarchs are not to be blamed for having married several wives, since they did not act thus without divine dispensation, yet Christ our Lord has clearly shown that polygamy is not in keeping with the nature of Matrimony. Here are His words: *For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh;*[1] and He adds: *wherefore they are no more two but one flesh.* In these words He makes it clear that God instituted Marriage to be the union of two and only two persons. The same truth He has taught very distinctly in another passage, wherein He says: *Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery against her; and if the wife shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.*[2] For if it were lawful for a man to have several wives, there is no reason in the world why he who takes to himself a second wife along with the wife he already has should be regarded as more guilty of adultery than he who dismisses his first wife and takes a second.

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[1] Matt. xix. 5.

[2] Mark x. 11, 12.

Hence it is that when an infidel who, following the customs of his country, has married several wives, happens to be converted to the true religion, the Church orders him to dismiss all but the first and regard her alone as his true and lawful wife.

V.—INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE

20.—Marriage is indissoluble.

The self-same testimony of Christ our Lord easily proves that the marriage-tie cannot be broken by any sort of divorce. For if by a bill of divorce a woman were freed from the law that binds her to her husband, she might marry another husband without being in the least guilty of adultery. Yet our Lord says positively: *Whosoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another committeth adultery.*[1] Hence it is clear that the bond of Marriage can be dissolved by death alone, as is confirmed by the Apostle when he says: *A woman is bound by the Law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband die she is at liberty—let her marry whom she will, only in the Lord;*[2] and again: *To them that are married, not I but the Lord commandeth that the wife depart not from her husband; and if she depart that she remain unmarried or be reconcilied to her husband.*[3] To the wife, then, who for a just cause has left her husband, the Apostle offers this alternative: let her either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. Nor does the Church of God permit husband and wife to separate without weighty reasons.

Lest, however, the law of Matrimony should seem too severe on account of its absolute indissolubility, the pastor should take care to point out the beneficial consequences of this indissolubility :—

21.—The various advantages of indissolubility enumerated.

(*a*) The first beneficial consequence is that in entering Matrimony, virtue and congeniality of disposition are to be considered more than wealth or beauty—a circumstance that cannot but prove of the very highest advantage to the interests of society at large.

(*b*) In the second place, if Marriage could be dissolved by divorce, married persons would hardly ever be without causes of disunion, which would be unfailingly supplied by the old enemy of peace and purity ; while on the contrary, now that the faithful must remember that even though separated as to bed and board, they remain none the less bound by the bond of Marriage with no hope of marrying another, they are by this very fact rendered less prone to strife and discord. And even if it sometimes does happen that husband and wife become separated, they are unable to bear the privation of their marriage rights for any length of time, and are thus easily induced by the intervention of friends to return and be reunited.

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[1] Luke xvi. 18.

[2] 1 Cor. vii. 39

[3] 1 Cor. vii. 10.

22.—Those separated may be again united.

The pastor should not here omit the salutary admonition of St. Augustine, who to convince the faithful that they should not consider it a hardship to receive back the wife they have put away for adultery, provided she repents of her crime, observes : "Why should not the Christian husband receive back his wife when the Church receives her ? And why should not the wife pardon her adulterous but penitent husband when Christ has already pardoned him ?" True it is that Scripture calls him *foolish* who *keepeth an adulteress ;*[1] but the meaning refers to her who refuses to repent of her crime and quit the disgraceful course she has entered on.

From all this it will be clear that Christian Marriage is far superior in dignity and perfection to that of Gentiles and Jews.

VI.—BLESSINGS ARISING FROM MARRIAGE

23.—The advantages of Marriage enumerated ; (a) family.

The faithful should also be shown that there are three blessings of Marriage—children, fidelity, and the sacrament :—blessings which to some degree compensate for the inconveniences referred to by the Apostle in the words : *Such shall have tribulation of the flesh,*[2] and which lead to this other result that sexual intercourse, which is sinful outside Marriage, is rendered right and honourable.

The first blessing, then, of Marriage is family, that is to say, children born of a true and lawful wife. So highly did the Apostle esteem this blessing that he says : *The woman shall be saved by bearing children*[3]—words which are to be understood not only of child-bearing, but also of bringing them up and training them to the practice of piety ; for the Apostle immediately subjoins the proviso: *If she continue in faith.* Moreover Holy Scripture says positively: *Hast thou children? Instruct them and bow down their necks from childhood.*[1] The same is taught by the Apostle; while Tobias, Job, and several other holy Patriarchs in Sacred Scripture furnish us with beautiful examples of the training that parents should give their children. The duties of both parents and children will, however, be set forth in detail when we come to speak of the Fourth Commandment.

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[1] Prov. xviii. 22.
[2] Cor. vii. 28.
[3] 1 Tim. ii. 15.

24.—(*b*) Fidelity. The second advantage of marriage is faith—not indeed that virtue of faith which we receive in Baptism; but the fidelity which binds wife to husband and husband to wife in such a way that each hands over to the other the power over their bodies, promising at the same time never to violate the holy bond of Matrimony. This is easily inferred from the words pronounced by Adam when taking Eve as his wife—words confirmed by Christ our Lord in the Gospel: *Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh.*[2] It is also inferred from the words of the Apostle: *The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and in like manner, the husband hath not power of his own body but the wife.*[3] Justly, then, did the Lord in the Old Law ordain the most severe penalties against those who violated this conjugal fidelity.

Matrimonial fidelity also demands that they love one another with a special, holy, and pure love—not as adulterers love one another, but as Christ loves His Church. This is the rule laid down by the Apostle who says: *Husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the Church.*[4] And truly immense was Christ's love for His Church—a love that was not inspired by His own advantage, but by the advantage of His Spouse alone.

25.—(*c*) Sacrament. The third advantage is the *sacrament*, that is to say the indissoluble bond of Marriage. We read in the Apostle: *The Lord commanded that the wife depart not from the husband, and if she depart that she remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife.*[5] And truly, if Marriage as a sacrament represents the union of Jesus Christ with His Church it also necessarily follows that just as Christ never separates Himself from His Church, so in like manner the wife can never be separated from her husband in so far as regards the marriage-tie.

[1] Eccles. vii. 25. [2] Matt. xix. 5. [3] 1 Cor. vii. 4 [4] Eph. v. 25. [5] 1 Cor. vii. 10.

But the more easily to preserve this holy union in peace and concord, it will be necessary to point out the various duties of husband and wife as laid down by St. Paul, and by St. Peter the Prince of the Apostles.

VII.—THE DUTIES OF MARRIED PEOPLE

26.—The husband's principal duties.

(*a*) It is the duty of the husband to treat his wife kindly and in an honourable manner. It should be remembered that Eve was called his *companion* by Adam when he said: *The woman whom Thou gavest me as a companion.*[1] It is for this reason, according to some of the Fathers, that she was not formed from man's feet but from his side; or on the other hand that she was not formed from his head, in order to let her see that she was not to command but obey her husband.

(*b*) In the second place, it is fitting that the husband be employed in some honest pursuit to furnish his family with the necessaries of life, and save himself from wasting his time in idleness—the source of almost all vices.

(*c*) Finally, he should keep his family properly in order, watch over their morals, and keep each one to his duty.

27.—The wife's duties.

(*a*) As for the wife, her duties are thus enumerated by the Prince of the Apostles: *Let wives be subject to their husbands, so that if any believe not the word they may be gained without the word by the conversation of their wives, considering your chaste conversation with fear. Let not their adorning be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel, but the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and meek spirit which is rich in the sight of God. For after this manner heretofore the holy women also, who trusteth in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their husbands, as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.*[2]

(*b*) Another principal duty of wives is to bring up their children in the practice of religion, and be assiduous in the care of domestic affairs. They should love to remain at home, unless compelled by necessity to go elsewhere, and even then they should not do so without the permission of their husbands.

(*c*) In fine,—and herein the conjugal union chiefly appears —they should always remember that after God no one is to be loved or esteemed by them more than their husbands, and that in all things not contrary to Christian piety they are to be subject to them and obey them promptly and cheerfully.

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[1] Gen. iii. 2.

[2] 1 Pet. iii. 16.

VIII.—FORMALITIES OF MARRIAGE

28.—Rites observed in the celebration of Marriage.

Following on the explanation of all this, the pastor will point out the rites to be observed in contracting Marriage. On these, however, there is no need for us to dwell here, since all the principal points to be observed have been fully and accurately laid down by the Council of Trent, whose decree cannot be unknown to the pastor. It is quite sufficient, then, for us to warn him to be careful to draw from the Council's teaching all that regards this point, and accurately to explain it to his flock.

29.—Clandestinity.

To guard young persons (whose very age exposes them to imprudence) from being deceived by a merely nominal Marriage, and from rushing incautiously into sinful unions, the pastor will very particularly and very frequently point out to them that these marriages alone are true and valid which are contracted in the presence of the parish priest, or of another priest by his leave, or by leave of the bishop, along with a certain number of witnesses.

30.—The impediments of Matrimony.

The impediments of Marriage are also to be explained. This subject has been so carefully treated by many wise and learned writers on the virtues and vices, that it will be easy for the pastor to make use here of all they have left written on the point, and all the more so, inasmuch as such books should hardly ever be out of his hands. Accordingly the pastor will carefully study and will diligently explain to his flock the instructions contained in those books, as well as in the decrees of the Council, regarding the impediments arising from spiritual relationship, public honesty, and fornication.

31.—Dispositions with which to approach Matrimony.

From all that has been said it is easy to infer the dispositions with which the faithful should contract Marriage. They should bear in mind that the union they are about to contract is not human, but divine, and that it should be accompanied by great purity and special piety, as is proved by the example of the Fathers of the Old Law, whose Marriages, though not elevated to the dignity of a sacrament, were yet esteemed as a holy and religious rite.

32.—The parents' consent.

Amongst the rest, children should be specially exhorted to show honour to their parents or guardians by never contracting Marriage without their knowledge, nor against their will and wish. We see in the Old Testament that children were always settled in Marriage by their parents; while the Apostle seems to have in mind the great deference due to parents in this matter, when he says: *He that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well: and he that giveth her not doth better.*[1]

33.—The use of Marriage.

It now remains to speak of the use of Marriage, in treating of which subject the pastor will take great care to avoid every word that is unfit for the ears of his hearers, or likely to wound pious souls and excite ridicule. *As the words of the Lord are pure words;*[2] so does it become him who is charged with the mission of instructing the Christian people to use no language that does not breathe the spirit of gravity and purity of soul. On this point there are certain lessons to be given to the faithful:—

(*a*) The first is that Marriage is not to be used for purposes of sensuality or lust, but with due regard to the limits prescribed by God as already explained. The Apostle's exhortation should not be forgotten: *They that have wives let them be as those who have them not;*[3] nor the words of St. Jerome: "A wise man will love his wife with judgment, not with passion; he will regulate his impetuous desires, and will not be carried away by passion. There is nothing more shameful than for a husband to love his wife as an adulteress."

(*b*) But as all blessings are to be obtained from God by prayer, the second lesson to be given to the faithful is that, for the sake of praying God and begging His graces, they should sometimes abstain from the use of Marriage. The Fathers have laid it down as a holy and pious injunction that this should be done for at least three days before receiving Holy Communion, and frequently during Lent. Thus will the blessings of Matrimony be daily increased by an abundance of divine grace, and thus, living in the practice of piety, they will not only pass this life in peace and tranquillity, but will also live in the true and firm hope, which *confoundeth not,* of obtaining life everlasting through the goodness of God.

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[1] Cor. vii. 38.
[2] Ps. xi. 7.
[3] Cor. vii. 29.

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1. NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Q. What is the sacrament of Matrimony?

A. Matrimony is a sacrament, instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, which creates a holy and indissoluble union between a man and woman, and gives them grace to love one another holily and to bring up their children as Christians.

Q. By whom was Matrimony instituted?

A. Matrimony was instituted by God Himself in the Garden of Paradise, and was raised to the dignity of a sacrament by Jesus Christ in the New Law.

Q. Has the sacrament of Matrimony any special signification?

A. The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the indissoluble union of Jesus Christ with the Church, His Spouse, and our holy Mother.

Q. Why do we say that the bond of marriage is indissoluble?

A. We say that the bond of marriage is indissoluble or that it cannot be dissolved except by the death of either husband or wife, because God so ordained from the beginning and so Jesus Christ our Lord solemnly proclaimed.

Q. Can the contract be separated from the sacrament in Christian marriage?

A. No, in marriage among Christians the contract cannot be separated from the sacrament, because, for Christians, marriage is nothing else than the natural contract itself, raised by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a sacrament.

Q. Among Christians, then, there can be no true marriage that is not a sacrament?

A. Among Christians there can be no true marriage that is not a sacrament.

Q. What effects does the sacrament of Matrimony produce?

A. The sacrament of Matrimony: (1) Gives an increase of sanctifying grace; and (2) gives a special grace for the faithful discharge of all the duties of the married state.

2. MINISTER.—RITE.—DISPOSITIONS.

Q. Who are the Ministers of this sacrament?

A. The Ministers of this sacrament are the couple themselves, who together confer and receive the sacrament.

Q. How is this sacrament administered?

A. This sacrament, preserving, as it does, the nature of a contract, is administered by the contracting parties themselves, who declare, in the presence of the parish priest, or another priest delegated by him, and of two witnesses, that they take each other in marriage.

Q. What use, then, is the blessing which the parish priest gives to the married couple?

A. The blessing which the parish priest gives to the married couple is not necessary to constitute the sacrament, but it is given to sanction their union in the name of the Church and to invoke on them more abundantly the blessing of God.

Q. What intention should those have who contract marriage ?

A. Those who contract marriage should have the intention : (1) Of doing the will of God, who calls them to that state ; (2) Of working out in that state the salvation of their souls ; (3) Of bringing up their children as Christians, if God should bless them with any.

Q. How should those about to be married prepare themselves to receive this sacrament with fruit ?

A. In order to receive this sacrament with fruit, those about to be married should : (1) Earnestly recommend themselves to God, so as to know His will and obtain the graces necessary for that state ; (2) Consult their parents before making any promise, because obedience and the respect due to them demand this ; (3) Prepare themselves by a good confession, or, if necessary, a general confession of their whole life ; (4) Avoid all dangerous familiarity in word or act while in each other's company.

Q. Which are the principal obligations of married persons ?

A. Married persons should : (1) Guard inviolably their conjugal fidelity and behave always and in all things as Christians ; (2) Love one another, bear patiently with one another, and live in peace and concord ; (3) Think seriously of providing for their children, if they have any, according to their needs ; bring them up as Christians, and leave them free to choose the state of life to which they are called by God.

3. Conditions and Impediments

Q. What is necessary to contract Christian marriage validly ?

A. To contract Christian marriage validly it is necessary to be free from every *diriment* impediment to marriage ; and to give consent freely to the marriage contract in the presence of the parish priest (or a priest delegated by him) and of two witnesses.

Q. What is necessary to contract marriage lawfully ?

A. To contract marriage lawfully it is necessary to be free from every *impeding* impediment to marriage ; to be instructed in the principal truths of religion ; and, finally, to be in a state of grace ; otherwise a sacrilege would be committed.

Q. What are *impediments* to marriage ?

A. *Impediments* to marriage are certain circumstances which render marriage either *invalid or unlawful* The former are called *diriment* impediments and the latter *impeding* impediments.

Q Give examples of *diriment* impediments.

A. *Diriment* impediments are, for example, relationship to the fourth degree, spiritual relationship, a solemn vow of chastity, or difference in religion, that is, when one party is baptized and the other is not.

Q. Give examples of *impeding* impediments.

A. *Impeding* impediments are, for example, the forbidden times, a simple vow of chastity, and the like.

Q. Are the faithful obliged to make known to ecclesiastical authority impediments of which they have a knowledge ?

A. The faithful are obliged to make known to ecclesiastical authority impediments of which they have knowledge; and for this reason the names of those who intend to get married are published in the Church.

Q. Who has the power to regulate impediments to marriage, to dispense from them, and to judge of the validity of Christian marriage?

A. The Church alone has power to regulate impediments to marriage, to judge of the validity of marriage among Christians and to dispense from the impediments which she has placed.

Q. Why has the Church alone power to place impediments and to judge of the validity of marriage?

A. The Church alone has power to place impediments, to judge of the validity of marriage, and to dispense from the impediments which she has placed, because the contract, being inseparable from the sacrament in a Christian marriage, also comes under the power of the Church, to which alone Jesus Christ gave the right to make laws and give decisions in sacred things.

Q. Can the civil authority dissolve the bonds of Christian marriage by divorce?

A. No, the bond of Christian marriage cannot be dissolved by the civil authority, because the civil authority cannot interfere with the matter of the sacrament nor can it put asunder what God has joined together.*

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* In the text of the Catechism of Pius X certain questions are given, dealing with civil marriage, which, however, do not as a rule concern English-speaking countries, and are consequently omitted here.

Forty-first Instruction on the Sacraments

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY: ITS NATURE AND INSTITUTION

WE now come to speak of the seventh and last of the sacraments—a sacrament which the Apostle proclaims to be a great sacrament, because significant of great mysteries: *This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.*[1]

It is not easy to attach too much importance to the explanation of this sacrament. For the married state is the usual and ordinary lot of mankind, and is intimately bound up with the happiness or misery, not only temporal but also eternal, of the majority of men. A good marriage is the source of domestic peace and happiness; domestic peace and happiness facilitates the proper training of the children of a marriage; while the proper training of children implants in them the seeds of a good Christian life, no matter what the condition, or state, or employment to which divine Providence may destine them. In a bad marriage everything is the reverse—ceaseless strife and dissension between husband and wife; children tainted by their bad example, growing up in vice, and finally carrying trouble and disorder into the various walks of life in which they may be found. It is then an incontestable truth that marriage is, to a certain extent, the pivot on which hinges every blessing, both public and private, both temporal and eternal.

I shall divide the explanation of this subject into two parts—in the first I shall speak of marriage in itself, and in the second of the dispositions requisite for its worthy and profitable reception.

Matrimony considered in itself is the lawful union of man and woman to live together all their life, in order to bring forth children and rear them up for God and society.

This union was not always a sacrament; but always and at all times it was and is a contract instituted and blessed by God—a dignity assuredly unknown to those who recognize therein nothing more than a union purely carnal and animal, and not very much different from that of brutes—a dignity which God the Creator instituted from the beginning of the world when He gave Eve to Adam as a companion. Here is what Sacred Scripture, after having described the creation of Adam, tells us in the second chapter of Genesis: *And the Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone; let Us make him a help like unto himself. . . . Then the Lord cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and when he was fast asleep, He took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it; and the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam; and Adam said: This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.* And elsewhere (in the first chapter), *God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply and fill the earth.*

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[1] Eph. v. 32.

In this simple, plain, but divine account, we have not only the narrative of the primitive institution of marriage, but we also learn its Author, its principal qualities, and its primary object:—

God Himself declares the natural fitness of giving to the man He had created the companionship and help of a woman: *It is not good for man to be alone; let Us make him a help like unto himself.* God decreed that Adam was to be the father of all men who were destined to fill the place left vacant by the fallen angels, and to accomplish this purpose it was necessary for him to have a wife,—on the supposition, at least, that such a means was chosen by God for the propagation of the human race. Thus far, however, we have only the creation of the two sexes—not yet have we marriage.

Marriage was really established when God, after having created Eve, presented her to Adam—*He brought her to Adam.* The offering of this woman to Adam by God, and the offering which she spontaneously made of herself to him, asking his consent and praying him to accept her as his wife, in the same way as she was ready to accept and have him as her husband, was, as the Fathers say, a true deed of betrothal and marriage. Doubtless, the Lord, after having created Eve, could have become invisible to them, but He did not do so—He Himself even presented the wife to her husband. And why? Not only to show us the sanctity of that marriage at which He deigned to assist as the common Father of both, but especially to let us see the liberty that is requisite to contract it,—in other words, the necessity of the free and mutual consent of the contracting parties. The marriage was celebrated only after Adam and Eve had seen and known each other and had freely given their consent.

From this fact we must conclude that mutual consent of the man and woman, such as has always been and still is the practice, effects the bond of marriage; that the essence of marriage consists in this bond; and that as the mutual consent is the work of the contracting parties it follows that they alone are the efficient causes of the marriage union—a union by which the wife pertains specially and exclusively to the husband, and the husband specially and exclusively to the wife; a union not only of body but also, and much more so, of affection and will; a union by which two persons come to form one single person, one single spirit, one only flesh; in fine, a union permanent, perpetual, and indissoluble.

The two chief qualities of this union are clearly recognized by Adam in his divinely-inspired reply to the Lord—that is to say, indissolubility and unity.

Indissolubility, in the words: *A man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife*—words that denote the perpetuity of the bond which death alone can dissolve. It is true that later on divorce was introduced amongst the Jews, in virtue of which man and woman became free to contract marriage with another. But this practice, which was either merely permitted or simply tolerated, has certainly been abolished in the Gospel by Jesus Christ, who recalled marriage to that indissolubility of bond in which it had been instituted from the beginning, and from which God had dispensed for a time in condescension to the hardness and obstinacy of the Jews: *Moses, by reason of the hardness of your heart, permitted you to put away your wives;* [1] *but from the beginning it was not so*, and: *What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.* [2]

In spite of the opinion of certain persons, real formal divorce—involving the dissolution of the marriage-tie—is absolutely forbidden under the law of the Gospel; while in addition to this it would be injurious to the public weal and ruinous to domestic happiness. Once allow husband and wife to separate at their own sweet will and to enter into other alliances, and what will be the consequence? This: their union is merely precarious, and would soon give occasion to new wishes and new desires;—tired and weary of those they already possess, they would turn their attention to others; they could never be united in true affection, for the heart can never be truly attached to an object the permanent possession of which is not fixed and certain. Furthermore, what affection could there be towards their children? what care could they take of their bringing up, seeing that they are always exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of others? Divorce, therefore, would be the direct cause of the disunion of both husband and wife and families.

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[1] Matt. xix. 8.

[2] Ibid. 6.

All these and other very serious inconveniences find no sufficient counterbalance in the reasons brought forward in support of divorce, such, for instance, as the cross and martyrdom arising from certain ill-assorted alliances. In the first place such marriages would not be so frequent if they were contracted holily and in a spirit conformable to the teaching of religion; and those whose union does actually prove unhappy should blame themselves and not the perpetuity of the marriage tie. Besides this, the Church has sufficiently provided for their peace of mind by granting a separation in certain cases, though always preserving the inviolability of the marriage bond which prevents them from contracting other marriages. For the rest, when we compare the good and the evil of both systems we shall easily see that the law of indissolubility is preferable under every respect. The very public weal demands that the words of our Lord should stand firm and unchanged: *What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*

The second quality of marriage is that unity expressed by Adam in the words: *They shall be two in one flesh;* that is to say, marriage is in its very nature the union of one man and one woman. At no time was it lawful for a woman to have several husbands, because this would be a horrible and unnatural evil. It was, however, sometimes lawful for men to have several wives, as is shown by the history of the ancient patriarchs. But as this practice was contrary to the primaeval institution of marriage, was subject to grave inconveniences, and was merely tolerated to avoid greater evils, Jesus Christ revoked it, abolished the practice of having several wives at the same time, and restored to marriage its original unity: *They shall be two in one flesh,* precisely as it was instituted in the garden of Paradise.

Finally, God's words: *Increase and multiply* refer to the primary object of marriage which was blessed by God to serve for the propagation of the human race—a blessing which, as the Church says, has remained over mankind even after original sin, and has never been revoked.

But as the words *Increase and multiply* have been and are made use of for the condemnation of virginity and celibacy by heretics, who pretend that these words contain a command making marriage binding on all mankind, we must remark that the words in question do not express a real command, but only denote that the faculty and power to increase and multiply has been communicated to human nature by God; and even if they did express a real precept, this could not be taken as applicable to each and every individual, but simply to the human race in general, whose conservation and progagation are sufficiently provided for by the marriage of the many; for when account is taken of the natural inclination of mankind towards the state of matrimony, the majority will never fail to enter thereon, even though some may use the liberty accorded them by God, and decline to form any matrimonial alliance.

Virginity and celibacy are not, then, to be condemned; nay, Sacred Scripture declares them to be of a better and more perfect state than marriage, inasmuch as that state is one of greater purity and chastity, and brings us nearer to the state of the angels and even of God Himself; it is, moreover, a state which affords greater facilities for union with God, inasmuch as it relieves those who embrace it from many cares and anxieties; and hence St. Paul has said that he who is not married finds it more easy to occupy himself with the things of God and the means of pleasing Him; while the married man is occupied with the cares of the world and has his mind fixed on his wife, and hence finds himself distracted from the things of God. And the Apostle concludes that, apart from certain special cases and exceptions, he who marries does well, but that he who does not marry does better: *He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God; but he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided. . . . He that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well; but he that giveth her not doth better.*[1]

There is, indeed, a certain class of celibacy which is forbidden by God, is contrary to the public weal, and baneful to the population. This certainly is not that Christian and religious celibacy, nor the celibacy of many persons in the world who without making any vow of chastity devote their whole soul to the affair of their salvation; but it is the celibacy of the free-living and the dissolute who refuse to enter into matrimony in order that they may abandon themselves freely to their passions and live a life of licence and disorder. Celibacy such as this is assuredly injurious to society, because it tends to the destruction of oneself as well as of others; because it kindles the flames of hatred and discord in families; spreads the venom of jealousy; troubles and severs marriages; and in fine, because it condemns to sterility a multitude of unhappy creatures, whom it causes to live in dishonour and misery; and it sometimes involves uncertainty of offspring and of lawful succession. This, then, is the celibacy that should be attacked with all our might—not the celibacy of those who embrace Christian chastity to please God, arrive at a higher degree of perfection, and be more free to devote themselves to the service of their neighbour.

Coming back to our subject, I now say that though virginity is preferable to marriage, this does not mean that the married state is not holy ; for it was instituted by God and therefore is holy. And if Church history furnishes us with illustrious examples of persons who lived holily in the state of celibacy, it also tells us of many who lived holily in the state of matrimony ; of this we have a solemn proof in the lives of the ancient patriarchs, especially Abraham. It would, then, be an error, and an error condemned by the Church, to regard marriage as something bad and unclean, and to despise those who embrace this state which has God Himself for its Author.

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 32.

But if marriage was a holy state under the Old Law, how much more holy and venerable has it not become since the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth ! Marriage which, under the Old Law, was only a simple natural contract has been raised by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a true sacrament in the New Law. He did not rest content with recalling it to its primaeval unity and indissolubility, but he also made it to be a sign capable of producing grace and holiness.

This He did, according to the general opinion, when He assisted at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, rendered memorable for ever by the miraculous change of water into wine which was there wrought by Him.

And in consequence of this institution of Christian marriage by our Lord, there is no longer to be found in the Church of God a true and lawful marriage contract which is not also a sacrament ; while a Catholic must celebrate that contract according to the rite of the Church—the contracting parties being bound to express their consent in the presence of the pastor and the requisite witnesses. The moment of marriage is, then, a moment of special sanctification to the betrothed, just as the moment of ordination is a moment of special sanctification for priests. In that moment the betrothed enter, as St. Paul says. on a state that is holy and honourable in every respect : *Marriage is honourable in all*—that is to say, it is a state holy in its essence, in its end, in its effects and in its signification.

Holy in its essence, because it is no longer a simple contract, as it is amongst pagans and unbelievers, but a true sacrament sanctifying and consecrating the betrothed by the very act that binds them together.

Holy in the different ends proposed by God in instituting it, such, for instance, as that of affording a remedy for concupiscence, of correcting abuses and rendering honest the inclinations of passion, of sanctifying the union of the two sexes, and in fine, of giving citizens to the earth and saints to heaven.

Holy in its effects, because along with sanctifying grace it also confers many special graces enabling the married to lead a good and holy life. The sacramental grace of Matrimony is of multiform application—it gives the grace of forbearance and charity, enabling husband and wife to love and bear with one another; the grace of temperance and restraint, enabling them to avoid passing the limits prescribed by honourable marriage; the grace of prudence and discretion, enabling them to bring up their children properly, and in the fear and love of God; finally, the grace of patience and endurance, enabling them to bear up under the weight of the tribulations and miseries from which not even the best regulated alliances are exempt.

Holy also in its signification; because it represents and signifies the hypostatic union of the Human Nature with the Divine Nature in Jesus Christ, and along with this the moral union of our Saviour with the Church, His Spouse; and hence it is that St. Paul declares that it is a great sacrament in Christ and in the Church.

Those about to enter into Matrimony should seriously reflect on all this. Whether we consider it in its primitive institution by God in the Garden of Paradise, or whether we regard it in the light of the subsequent dignity to which Jesus Christ raised it in the new Law, all is holy, all is sacred, all is great; and hence it follows that a state such as this should never be entered on for other than pure motives, and with dispositions in conformity with its sanctity, taking special care to consult God both on the choice of a state as well as on the choice of the person to be accepted as the life-long companion.

Unhappily this is not always done. The world which destroys all and corrupts all is accustomed to look on marriage as a purely temporal concern, with which religion has nothing to do, nor the affair of eternal salvation. And hence it is that so many throw themselves blindly and inconsiderately into this state; and hence also it is that so many marriages prove unhappy, and are turned into an occasion of the temporal and spiritual ruin of so many ill-assorted pairs. In our next instruction we shall turn our attention to this point, and shall dwell on the serious care and reflection that should precede the reception of a sacrament that involves so many and such lasting consequences and obligations.

Forty-second Instruction on the Sacraments

GUIDING PRINCIPLES REGARDING MATRIMONY

THE married state is one that is usually entered on with the best will and intention in the world ; but it not rarely happens that those who were extravagant in their haste and eagerness to be united are ere long ready to do twice as much to be separated. The first transports of love and affection are sometimes succeeded by coldness and indifference ; these soon lead to mutual recriminations, complaints, dissensions, and finally to open rupture and the scandal of separation ; so that of the union that was once so ardently desired it often happens that nothing remains but the hateful impossibility of escaping from a bond that now inspires nothing but feelings of sorrow and regret.

Now all this is due to no other cause than to the fact that marriage is often contracted blindly—directed by passion alone—without reflection, without counsel, without the requisite preparation, and without the serious reflection demanded by an affair of such importance. This and no other is the true reason why marriages often end in sorrow and regret.

Hence it is that having in my last instruction explained what marriage is in itself, both as a natural contract instituted and blessed by God at the beginning, and as raised by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a sacrament in the New Law, I now proceed to explain what is to be done in order to receive this sacrament worthily.

First and foremost, before deciding to contract marriage persons should beg for direction, light, and grace from God to enable them thoroughly to understand all the duties and obligations imposed by that state, and to see whether they are ready and prepared to discharge these duties and obligations as God would have them discharged. For marriage imposes obligations difficult to fulfil, burthens hard to bear, and occasionally grave dangers to avoid :—

1. In the first place marriage imposes grave obligations to be fulfilled, both with regard to the person about to be taken as a companion and help-mate, and to the children that are naturally to be expected to spring from that union.[1] With regard to the person, be

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[1] These discourses were addressed to men : but it will be easily seen that making due allowance, the same remarks apply also to women.

she what she may, and be her position in life what it may, you owe her a respectful, tender, faithful, patient, and Christian love. Now, what contradictions and difficulties must not be expected on the one hand in the exercise of a love of this character! On the other hand with regard to the children that may result from your union, is it possible to ignore the seriousness of the charge you are about to take on your shoulders? You must support them, provide for them, settle them in life, and above all, bring them up in piety and in the fear and love of God. In one word, a husband renders himself strictly responsible before God for the souls of his companion and of his children; and hence he is bound to live a truly edifying and Christian life. Now, who will say that the faithful discharge of all these obligations does not demand much care and trouble?

In the second place marriage is a state that imposes very trying crosses. Besides the burthens already referred to, we must truly account as crosses the eccentricities that may be found in one or other of the parties, the coolness and the dissensions, the trials of avarice on the one hand, and of extravagance on the other, the jealousies, the unwelcome intimacies with others, and sometimes also the fear or certainty of faithlessness. What a martyrdom is not that of two persons obliged to live together with no similarity in principles or practice! What sacrifices must they not make to live in peace and harmony! And independently of all that, who is unaware that even the best assorted marriages are not without their trials and contradictions, simply because there is nothing perfect in the world? The wisest and most prudent husband is not always wise and prudent; the best, most excellent, and most estimable of wives can hardly fail to have her own faults and defects. It is impossible for everything to go according to our liking—is not the mere difference in inclination and taste which may so easily arise between husband and wife, quite enough sometimes to put the patience of both to the severest tests?

Besides this, what need to speak of the tormenting cares and anxieties that accompany the rearing of children and the difficulties that are to be encountered in giving them a Christian education, a virtuous training, and a sufficient means of support? Often are wanting the means and resources requisite to place them in a position one would like; not rarely do they prove to be discontented, unsatisfactory, dull, incapable, or, what is worse, vicious, dissolute, and little in correspondence with the care that has been taken of them. And the more this is the case, the more vexations, torments, and miseries are multiplied.

But this is not all; for in the third place marriage involves great dangers to conscience, apart altogether from the trials and dangers already enumerated. Each state has its own difficulties, trials, and dangers; but in marriage is found the union of three things that are extremely difficult to conciliate —married persons must use their rights without violating their duties; they must conciliate their care and desire to please their partner with the inviolable fidelity they owe to God; and they must unite particular care and economy in the matter of their temporal concerns with a certain interior detachment of hearts in such a way that this care and attention to business will not stand in the way of the discharge of their duties as Christians and the acquisition of the goods of life eternal.

Such, then, are the obligations, the cares, and the crosses incident to married life—obligations, cares, and crosses that are far from being fleeting and transitory, but last and endure as long as the marriage-tie itself.

All this, however, has been said, not for the sake of making marriage odious, nor of turning you away from it, but simply to teach those who are about to contract it to reflect seriously on the burthen they are about to take on their shoulders, and not to embrace it if they do not feel called to it by God. It is only for those whom He has called that He prepares the helps and graces without which the duties of that state cannot be discharged, its crosses patiently borne, nor the dangers annexed to it avoided. God wishes to be served in that particular state to which He calls each one of us; and consequently to each one of us He assigns the graces we have need of to serve Him properly in that state. Hence it is clear that to enter on a particular state through mere caprice and without any call, is to lose all right to such graces, expose oneself to danger, and run the risk of eternal perdition. This principle applies to every state, not excluding Matrimony; and, speaking especially of Matrimony, I must not forget another important consideration, and it is that not only should the divine will be consulted in reference to the choice of a state in life, but also in reference to the choice of the person to whom one wishes to be united in a companionship that death alone can dissolve.

No one can be blind to the importance of selecting a suitable companion. Now, how is this to be done?

First of all recourse should be had to God to obtain light and grace in reference to the selection about to be made. From God alone can come each and every blessing: *Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights;*[1] but from Him in a special way comes the gift of a wise and prudent companion, according to the oracle of the Holy Ghost: *House and riches are given*

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[1] James i. 17.

by parents ; but a prudent wife is properly from the Lord.[1] Prayer, then, humble and incessant prayer, should precede and accompany your marriage—the one reliable way of knowing the divine will is through prayer.

It is furthermore necessary to merit these lights from God by a good, holy, and Christian life, especially during youth ; the Lord Himself has said in Sacred Scripture that a good and virtuous wife is the recompense reserved by Him for the God-fearing man : *A good wife is a good portion ; she shall be given in the portion of them that fear God, to a man for his good deeds* ;[2] and what has been said of a wife with reference to her husband, applies equally to the husband with reference to his wife

Finally, the choice should be made in accordance with Christian principles—a condition that embraces several considerations :—

In the first place it implies that young people should consult their parents on their intended marriage, and be advised by them. It is true that children should be left free in their choice—both reason and nature loudly proclaim this liberty ; but it is not less true that they should unfailingly recognize and respect their parents' authority, which is also founded on reason, being, as it is, based on the divine precept to honour father and mother—a precept that has also the support and sanction of human law. These two rights when properly understood are not, as might be expected at first sight, in opposition to each other ; for the liberty that is accorded to sons and daughters on this head imposes on parents the obligation not to interfere unduly with their children in their choice ; while the right possessed by parents to watch over and guard the safety and well-being of their children imposes on those children a sacred and indispensable obligation not to act independently of their parents, but to consult their wishes and follow their advice.

Hence it follows that just as parents would sin gravely if through special considerations of family or fortune they tried either to force their children to contract a marriage, or prevent them from contracting marriage, or constrained them to enter into an alliance which they detest on good grounds, to the manifest injury of their children's liberty, and the manifest abuse of their own authority ; so in the same way children would sin gravely against the submission and obedience they owe, if they were to contract marriage without consulting their parents ; if they do not listen to the just and reasonable objections that may be made by their parents ; and if against their parents' wishes they persist in contracting a doubtful or disgraceful alliance which would compromise domestic peace and tranquillity. Marriages of this kind,—that is to say, marriages of caprice and passion,—are seldom blessed by God, and seldom turn out well. Bear this point, then,well in mind,—dependence on your parents, to whom you are always subject and indebted, who have greater light and experience than you, and who are not so blinded by passion as you may well be.

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[1] Prov. xix. 14.

[2] Eccl. xxvi. 3

Another important point for those who desire to proceed in accordance with Christian principles, and to which even parents themselves should not be blind, is this, that in making the choice in question attention should be devoted principally to interior qualities of chastity, virtue, prudence, good disposition and training. And in fact these qualities alone can supply for the defect of exterior advantages; these alone last for all time; to these alone God has promised true felicity. It was thus that Abraham acted when selecting a companion for his son Isaac; this also was the course taken by Jacob, Tobias, and many others.

At the same time I used the word *principally*, for I do not pretend that you should close your eyes altogether to the gifts of nature and the advantages of fortune. Take account of these also—they are not contrary to the sanctity of marriage; but the first and principal point to consider is character and piety—they are the endowments to be sought before all others; without them all the rest is nothing more than a miserable and deceitful dowry.

To sum up all in a few words, exterior endowments cannot of themselves constitute married bliss. For in what does the true happiness of this state consist? It consists in mutual affection, inviolable fidelity, loving care of children, good management of domestic affairs, serious application to one's duties as wife, mistress, and mother. Now these precious endowments are not derived from riches, nor from noble birth, nor from beauty of face and form—they are found only in the woman who is truly pious, prudent, and carefully brought up. It is, then, to virtue, character, and beauty of soul, that attention should principally be paid in the choice of a wife.

Regarding the care and attention that should be devoted to this point, the following observations should be borne in mind:—

Before consenting to an engagement, keep your eyes carefully open—do not trust to first impressions; and do not rely on one or other single disposition or endowment which may easily prove deceptive; consult those who are well informed enough to know the truth, and sincere enough not to conceal it; and if the information you receive produces an unfavourable impression, do not attribute it to malice or envy, but take it into account and investigate it thoroughly, for it not rarely happens that of all the accounts you receive that which is unfavourable is the only one which is true, sincere, and just.

And these investigations should be all the more scrupulous in proportion as the person in question is less known to you, especially in the case of strangers and of those who wander from place to place, who are often nothing better than adventurers. How often have poor girls been grossly deceived by people of this class; they believed them to be rich and comfortable, whereas they were only poor and wretched; they believed them to be upright and honest, whereas they were deceitful and vicious; worse still, they thought them to be single and free, whereas they were already bound by the tie of a former marriage. Regarding such as those, too much vigilance cannot be used. And in fact, how is it possible, in such a case, to neglect the simple dictates of prudence? We may, it is true, be deceived because we are men; but it is none the less true that not to do our best to avoid being deceived is foolish in the highest degree.

In the last place I must not forget to add a very important advice, and it is, that even among virtuous persons she ought to be chosen who is best adapted by similarity of disposition, of age, of condition, and of state in life.

1. Similarity of character. The bare difference of temperament often renders marriages unhappy, even where there is no other essential defect. The wife may be good, the husband may be good; but the mixture is different,—different in their inclinations, their manners, their tastes. There is a consequent lack of sympathy, and the result is an absence of harmony.

2. Consistently with this principle, there should not be a notable disparity in years. The habits and inclinations of youth are different from the habits of mature years and of old age; and it is improbable that a young girl and a man who might be her father can live together without clashing of tastes and affections. Aversion and contempt are likely to arise on one side; jealousy and hate on the other; not to mention the unfortunate children who must inevitably lose their father in their tender years.

3. Finally, there should not be too great a disparity in condition and state. Marriages between the noble and the lowly born, between rich and poor, are usually the result of blind passion that tolerates no previous reflection; but as soon as the first impulse of passion subsides, regret takes its place and is followed by annoyance, indifference, aversion, hatred, reproach, thus rendering the union hateful and insupportable.

Conformity and similarity are, then, of the greatest importance. Marriage is a state of mutual affection and confidence; and affection and confidence cannot as a rule exist and be maintained unless between equals.

But who can give you a wife suitable under every respect? God alone—God loved, God invoked, God faithfully served—behold the true source of the prosperous and happy termination of all endeavours, of all affairs, of all works, and in particular of all marriages.

I must not, however, be understood to mean that by fulfilling these conditions you may promise yourself total exemption from misery—on the contrary, tribulation is, according to St. Paul, the lot of all married persons without distinction : *Such shall have tribulation of the flesh*[1]; but I do wish to say that by entering on the holy state of Matrimony with a true vocation, and a rich dowry of virtues, you will not fail to find strength to bear its burthens. For in this case an afflicted husband or wife can turn to God and say to Him in all confidence : " Thou hast laid this burthen on my shoulders—help me to bear it," and God will assuredly not refuse His helps and graces. But how can these supernatural helps, this divine assistance, be hoped for by those who enter Matrimony blindly, and who consult nothing but their passions. They, themselves, have chosen their own hell ; they must bear it, for God owes them nothing.

Let those, then, who have thoughts of Matrimony think well on it. To avoid possible misfortunes let them carefully put in practice the suggestions that have been made in the course of this instruction.

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 28.

Forty-third Instruction on the Sacraments

HOW TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY WORTHILY

As the married state is a holy state, and as it involves a life-long contract and many grave obligations, it is clear that it should not be entered on without serious preparation and without good and holy dispositions.

First of all, the sacrament demands purity of intention. *We,* said Tobias, when about to celebrate his marriage with Sara, *we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God.*[1] With much greater reason should this be said by Christians, who are bound to acknowledge that marriage is no longer a simple contract, or a simple religious ceremony, but a true and great sacrament of the New Law. Marriage, then, must be celebrated in a Christian, not a heathen, manner. And what is it that distinguishes the marriage of Christians from that of heathens ? Purity of intention, Christian conduct, and the devout and holy celebration of the sacrament.

Now, what intentions should you have for your marriage to be holy and Christian ? The first should be that which God had in view in instituting marriage. God intended to establish in marriage an agreeable and pleasant companionship, so as to enable man and woman to afford each other mutual help and comfort in family cares and trials and labours, and thus the more easily to attain their last end, eternal salvation : *It is not good for man to be alone ; let Us make him a help like unto himself.*[1] The glorious marriage of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin had no other object than mutual and affectionate assistance. This union, says St. Augustine, is called marriage, not because of the actual union of bodies, but because of the supernatural union of souls—a union which establishes between man and woman a perfect community of joys and sorrows, of labour and rest, of fortune and misfortune. If, then, you find that you are not able to govern your house alone, you are at perfect liberty to choose a good and pious companion to be your companion and helper

The second end—an end both lawful and holy—is indicated by

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[1] Tob. viii. 5:

[1] Gen. ii. 18:

St. Paul. It is to seek and find in marriage a remedy against incontinence which is the cause of the damnation of many: *For fear of fornication let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*[1] And truly is it not far better to have recourse to this remedy than to live in a continual state of sin and damnation? *It is better to marry than to burn,*[2] says St. Paul. Virginity is, indeed, higher and nobler than marriage; but for one who cannot support virginity, it is better to marry.

The third and last end—the noblest and most perfect end—is that of having children to be regenerated by Baptism and brought up holily to praise and glorify God in this life and in the life to come.

Many marriages prove unhappy—may we not ascribe the reason to the unworthy motives with which the union is often entered on?

Besides purity of intention, those about to contract marriage should zealously observe honest and honourable, modest and Christian, relations towards each other throughout all the time that precedes their union—they should be modest and prudent and carefully avoid everything savouring of impropriety, or sin, or excess, in their visits and meetings. Parents should be especially careful to see that their children who are about to be married behave with due regard to modesty and propriety, and avoid all occasions likely to lead to sin. Persons about to marry, should, of course, be allowed to visit each other, and see each other, and converse with each other, so as to understand each other and cherish and increase mutual affection; but always under prudent restrictions, and within proper limits.

Parents should be on their guard in admitting persons into their house on the pretext of bringing about a union with one of their children. It is not rare to see young men who without the least thought or intention of marrying take the dishonourable pleasure of amusing themselves with young girls for months or years, to the great detriment of their spiritual and temporal interests; and then when it comes to the moment to decide, they coolly vanish to return no more. Before permitting such visits, parents should carefully enquire who they are, what are their motives and intentions, whether they are in a position to settle down in married life, and whether their family is likely to approve. Acting otherwise, parents will only succeed in exposing their children to the risk of pain and sorrow resulting from unrequited affection and bleeding hearts.

And supposing they find everything satisfactory, they should not consent to have marriage deferred to too distant a date, in order to afford as little room as possible for the sinful intercourse and deplorable acts of folly that may easily attend long engagements. Besides this, it not unfrequently happens in the case of long engagements that the agreement to marry is broken off, with the result that the families become estranged and are exposed to public ridicule; while girls thus deserted seldom escape suffering in popular estimation.

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[1] 1 Cor. vii. 2.

[2] 1 Cor. vii. 9.

In all, then, that concerns the intercourse you permit your children who are under promise of marriage, it is always well not to be too ready to form too favourable an opinion of them. Human nature is always corrupt; and hence it is no use to say, "Oh! my daughter is wise, and pious and God-fearing; and this young man is a model of modesty; not even once have I noticed the slightest impropriety, nor even as much as an immodest word." That may be all true; but as long as human nature is human nature, their wisdom and their virtue form but a weak rampart against the force of evil occasions and violent passions. Care and watchfulness—behold a parent's duty.

Turning for a moment to young people, I must add that while the presence of their parents can indeed prevent criminal words and deeds, it is powerless to prevent bad thoughts, improper desires, and the disordered affections of the heart. If you desire God to bless your union, you must be strictly on your guard against sins such as these—though completely interior, they none the less gravely soil the soul and are none the less hateful to God. This is strictly necessary if you desire to prepare worthily to receive a sacrament which in itself represents the purest and most immaculate of all unions—the union of Jesus Christ with His Church. Act, then, so as to be able to say to the Lord what Sara said of the time preceding her marriage with Tobias: *Thou knowest, O Lord, that I never coveted a husband, and have kept my soul clean from all lust.*[1]

In the third place, besides the purity of intention with which you should enter marriage, and the Christian conduct to be observed during the time that precedes its celebration, you must also receive the sacrament holily.

Marriage is no longer a purely natural contract, but a contract that has been sanctified and ennobled by the Lord. It is one of the seven sacraments of the Church, and its object is to establish an indissoluble union between a man and a woman as heads of a family and charged with the bringing up of their children—a sacrament received at the moment when in the presence of the priest and witnesses those who are being united express consent to their union. Marriage, then, cannot be properly celebrated between Christians unless in a holy and religious spirit, according to the general principle that "holy things should be treated holily."

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[1] Tob. iii. 16.

The first disposition with which to approach this sacrament consists in receiving it with a pure conscience free from any mortal sin. Should youth, dangerous occasions, and temptations have led you into sin, be careful to cleanse your soul by a good and salutary confession so as to avoid committing a sacrilege, and be thus deprived of the grace of the sacrament. Moreover, you should not defer your Confession till the last moment, but rather be careful to make it early and at an opportune time, so as to ensure that it is made properly and without undue haste or want of preparation.

Confession, however, is not enough. The sacrament of Matrimony involves great and inrevocable obligations in the sight of God. Hence, along with Confession, there is need of serious reflection and great devotion ; and the nearer the appointed day the more fervent and frequent should be your prayers to God that He may deign to bless the sacred union you are about to contract in His presence by solemn ceremony.

On your way to the church, fervently invoke the Holy Spirit, in order that He may sanctify this great union and its many consequences; implore the assistance of the Blessed Virgin, your Angel Guardian, and your patron saint, that their powerful protection may obtain you a good marriage and a holy and happy life in the days to come.

In presenting yourself at the altar to receive the nuptial blessing, look with the eyes of faith on God who is present assisting at your union. It is not the priest who forms the marriage-tie, nor is it yet the Church—it is God in person who invisibly assists at your union as of old He assisted at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. This one thought should suffice to excite great devotion in your heart, and enable you to act with due decorum and modesty.

Let that *I will*, which imposes so irrevocable an obligation on you, that *I will* by which you reply to the priest when he asks whether you freely and willingly consent to your union, remind you of the indissolubility of the bond you contract in the presence of God on the altar. And the ring which the priest sanctifies by prayer and blessing and directs you to insert on your wife's finger—what else is it but a symbol of fidelity and of mutual affection, a pledge of the inseparable union of hearts ?

It is a sorrowful and horrible sight to see the way in which many Christians present themselves before the altar to form a union, the consequences of which should rather cause fear and dread. To see the want of devotion, the levity, the boldness and the immodesty with which they approach to receive this sacrament, one would say that marriage is a matter of little importance, a mere ceremony. Is not this simply an insult to the majesty of the place, and to the sanctity of the sacrament? And if so, what is to be hoped for from espousals such as this? The Church invokes over them the happiest and holiest blessings; yet instead of the blessings of the Church, their own bad dispositions deserve nothing short of the curses of heaven.

That such marriages prove unhappy should cause no surprise. God and religion are excluded; and if God does not assist at the marriage, can we wonder if the devil should be present, and should strive to take possession of husband and wife; *They who in such manner receive Matrimony as to shut out God from themselves and from their mind . . . over them the devil hath power.*[1] Such is the remarkable expression of the Archangel Raphael to Tobias in answer to his objection to marrying Sara, who had already had seven husbands, each of whom had been struck dead the night of his marriage with her.

True, it is not likely that the fate that befell the husbands of Sara will happen to you; yet you should take every precaution lest that marriage from which you expect so much happiness and joy be converted into a source of bitterness and rancour, and that wife, whom you are marrying without the proper dispositions, become an incarnate demon, the trial and torment of all the dear days of your life—capricious, passionate, discontented, devoted to company and amusement, and caring nothing whatever for you, nor your children nor your house. Is it not only too common a story; and is it not a fate to be carefully guarded against?

But it must not be forgotten that the dispositions and reflections set forth in this and the previous instruction, are not all that is required in order to contract marriage validly or worthily. In addition to all this, it is required that there should be no impediment standing in the way of marriage between the pair; and as this subject is of great importance, we must dwell on it at some length before concluding this instruction.

In celebrating marriage certain conditions, which are called impediments, must be kept in view, carefully observed or scrupulously avoided; otherwise the marriage is either no marriage at all—that is, null and void—or though valid, those who contract it become guilty of very serious sin in doing so.

Hence it will be seen that impediments are of two very different kinds.—Annulling impediments, the presence of which renders a marriage absolutely null and void; and Prohibitive impediments, the presence of which does not make the marriage null and void, but renders the persons contracting it guilty of a grave sin.

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[1] Tob. vi. 17.

Annulling impediments are of various kinds, and most of them are well known. The more important are: 1. Relationship by blood or marriage. Blood relations are forbidden to marry up to the third degree—in other words second cousins are not permitted to marry. Relatives by marriage are also forbidden to marry—it is forbidden to marry the first cousin of one's former husband or wife. To a certain extent the same is true with regard to the spiritual relationship contracted by sponsors in Baptism. Thus a sponsor cannot marry his or her god-child. Holy Orders and solemn vows of chastity are also annulling impediments, as is difference of religion in the case in which one of the parties has never been baptized. Null and void also is a clandestine marriage, that is to say, a union contracted without the presence of the parish priest (or his delegate) and two witnesses. This, however, applies only to those countries in which the decree of the Council of Trent bearing on this point has been properly published, and has undergone no dispensation.

The chief prohibitive impediments are:—To marry one person while engaged to another; to marry after having made a private vow of chastity; to solemnize marriage during Advent and Lent, to contract a mixed marriage, such, for instance, as to marry a Protestant. That the Church has been and is wise and thoroughly justified in condemning and reprobating mixed marriages is proved by repeated experience—such marriages are repeatedly shown to be the fruitful source of public scandal, private misery, and ever-present danger to faith. This danger is especially evidenced in the case of the offspring of such marriages. God alone knows the countless numbers of children who have been lost to the Church and to Him because of mixed marriages. True, the Church, on account of special circumstances and pressing reasons, grants a dispensation under certain conditions; but even so, she always makes it clear that she does not approve, but merely permits such unions in order to avoid greater evils; and to show her disapproval of such marriages, she resolutely refuses to impart the solemn blessing which she gives to Christian unions. The priest may, indeed, be present, but not once does he raise his hand to impart the Church's benediction.

I shall now conclude by summing up all that has been said thus far with regard to the proper preparation for the celebration of Matrimony:—

1. First of all beg light and counsel from God; it is from Him that all our enterprises should begin, and especially those that are more difficult—without Him we can do no good.

2. Propose to yourself an honest motive; do not act out of caprice or passion ; aim only at the true and solid welfare of your soul —in this life we have only one soul to save ; and all the rest is as nothing if the soul is lost.

3. Be very prudent and circumspect in the choice of a partner ; to succeed, have recourse to the proper means and follow the advice of the Holy Spirit who tells you not to consider exterior qualities alone, but before all else to regard prudence, uprightness, and solid piety—gifts that far surpass riches and beauty.

4. Along with this there is required the holy fear of God at all times, and especially as the appointed day draws near. Far from you be all guilty liberties, all dangerous familiarities. If it is your interest to have a faithful spouse, why begin by banishing from her heart God's holy fear, modesty and chastity ? If you tempt her to become faithless to God, how can you expect she will remain faithful to you ?

5. Finally, approach the altar with that purity of conscience, with that chastity of heart, with that piety and faith which are justly demanded by the sanctity and dignity of this sacrament.

Adopting and using those means, you may be well assured that God will not fail to assist you, and that He will grant you the grace to make a good and holy and happy marriage.

END OF VOL. II.

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